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## Ways with writing

### An ethnographically oriented study of student writing support in higher education in the UK

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*Awarding institution:*  
King's College London

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# **Ways with writing**

*An ethnographically oriented study of student writing support  
in higher education in the UK*

**Weronika Górska-Fernando**

Supervised by Professor Brian Street & Professor Constant Leung

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
King's College London**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores student writing support in higher education in the UK. It aims to investigate what can be learnt from institutional writing support provision and from students' ways of engaging with academic writing. The thesis is set against the discourse of *deficit* as associated with student-writers and the critique of current writing support portrayed as insufficient in preparing students for discipline specific demands of written assessment. The study is informed by the Academic Literacies approach and considers student writing as social practice rather than as being defined solely in terms of textual and linguistic features. The study adopts an ethnographic perspective and draws on multiple sources of data: observations of writing support classes, interviews with writing tutors, academic staff and student writers, as well as samples of student writing accompanied with tutor feedback. The data are examined employing a variety of concepts from spoken and written discourse analysis, and the analysis focuses on the understanding of emic perspectives of research participants.

Based on the findings, the thesis argues that the current writing provision should be viewed as offering foundational writing support which could be positioned as part of broader institutional network. It also emphasises the importance of extending writing support from being focused on textual development to the inclusion of reflection, reading and discussion as central to engagement with disciplinary writing. The thesis further suggests that academic staff should be more involved in the writing support. With their situated knowledge of writing conventions, academic staff could add to the development of a social practice approach to support provision which could handle specificity of writing requirements and interdisciplinarity of academic programmes. Finally, the thesis argues that the notion of *deficit* should be reconceptualised as related to institutional shortfalls in provision rather than to student-writers. Overall, the study presented in this thesis contributes to an understanding of what is involved in the teaching and learning of academic writing, expanding the Academic Literacies scholarship in that area with the hope to inspire a re-thinking and a re-design of institutional writing support in UK academia.

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*– this thesis is dedicated to you*

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## List of acronyms

CA	Commerce Administration
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EGAP	English for General Academic Purposes
EL	European Law
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
EU	European Union
GP	Global Politics
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
NLS	New Literacy Studies
PMP	Pre-Masters Programme
RGS	Rhetorical Genre Studies
RQ	Research question
SCS	Socio-Cultural Studies
SGS	Sydney Genre School
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
US	United States
WAC	Writing across the Curriculum
WID	Writing in the Disciplines

## Chapter 1 – Researching writing support in UK higher education

### 1.1 Introduction

*It's like a game: they don't tell us; we have to do it – we have to write it ourselves.*  
(Luana, 2010-05-14)

The interview with one of my student participants, Luana, had just finished, and she and I started a more casual conversation regarding our plans for the coming weeks. Luana was preoccupied with her academic work, and it was then that she made a remark that opens this introductory chapter to my doctoral thesis. Referring to the writing of her essay assignments in her academic modules<sup>1</sup>, she said: *It's like a game: they don't tell us; we have to do it – we have to write it ourselves*. My attention was instantly captured by the *game* metaphor she used to relate her academic writing experience. Luana unpacked the metaphor by explaining that they – by which she meant both her academic and writing tutors – do not provide explicit guidance on assignment writing, leaving students to write somewhat by ‘trial and error’ (Gopee & Deane, 2013, p. 1625) when attempting to respond to the requirements of a given assessment.

Writing is central to students’ academic education. It constitutes ‘the dominant form of social action in the academy’ (Henderson & Hirst, 2007, p. 25), and it is a major form of assessment at British institutions of higher education. As a result, students’ ability to respond to writing requirements can be considered of paramount importance to their academic progress and eventual completion of their degrees (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; Wingate, 2012b). In other words, the inability to write academic texts puts students in danger of failing their courses, and may lead to an interruption of studies or, more gravely, to their withdrawing or being dropped from their programmes (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Viewed from this perspective academic writing is appropriately regarded as a ‘high-stakes’ activity (Hyland, 2002a, p. 220) and ‘the hallmark of success’ (C. Jones, 1999, p. 38).

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis I use a term ‘academic module’ to refer to classes that teach subject knowledge in a given academic discipline.

‘As an exercise in thought, writing must, to be fully fit for purpose, be undertaken in relation to the construction of knowledge and ways of presenting it within a specific writing domain’ (Clughen & Hardy, 2012, p. xix). Academic writing, therefore, as situated in the context of higher education (HE), involves the ability to communicate ideas following epistemological frameworks and disciplinary conventions of a given subject or a field of knowledge. To be successful in that type of writing students need to engage in ‘new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158). These *ways* are *new* in the sense that they are often different from everyday communication, or from the types of writing that students may be familiar with from their previous studies in other educational settings (Baker, 2013; Hardy & Boulton, 2012; Wingate, 2012a).

Attempting to understand Luana’s writing experience through the prism of the importance of writing to students’ academic success and through the complexity of disciplinary requirements, questions can be asked not only about the support available (or not) to student writers but also about how they learn the ‘rules of the game’ (Hardy & Clughen, 2012, p. 26), and how they respond to the demands of written assessment. These concerns are central to my study. I am interested in researching writing support in the UK higher education: what support is offered to students, how they understand writing requirements, how they approach the task of responding to these requirements, and how academic and writing tutors view issues related to both options of support available and the demands of written assessment. Even though similar concerns have driven research in academic literacy and student support for the past two decades (e.g., A. Carter, Lillis, & Parkin, 2009; Ivani & Lea, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998; Winch & Wells, 1995; Wingate, 2006), the mainstream institutional writing support has appeared not to have changed much as a result (Wingate, 2015). As the student body is becoming more and more diverse (Thomas, 2002), and as universities offer academic degrees that are interdisciplinary in nature and that require from students familiarity with writing in a variety of disciplinary fields (Nesi & Gardner, 2012), it is vital that students are adequately supported in their writing so that they can meet the demands of the assessment and successfully complete their degrees.

The research on writing support presented in this thesis is a result of a confluence of my professional and personal experience. When I began working on this project, I had been employed for about a year and a half as a writing tutor at one of the universities located in central London. I was offered that teaching post after my graduation with an MA degree in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching from the University of Wrocław in Poland. I felt comfortable in my new teaching role as the writing classes I was given to teach followed similar syllabi and course books to writing modules that I had taken as a student in the Department of English Studies in Wrocław. In fact, when working in London, one of books I had used as a student in Poland, namely: ‘Writing Arguments: A Rhetoric with Readings’, authored by Ramage, Bean and Johnson (2001) became my main teaching resource. The book is oriented towards general topics in social sciences and offers guidance on different types of arguments drawing largely on Toulmin’s argumentative model. At that time, educated as a language teacher, I worked from the assumptions that writing is one of four language skills and that in its core it is largely similar, if not the same, across all contexts. In my early professional experience, coffee and lunch breaks, during which I engaged in conversations with my colleagues, began to take me out of my comfort zone. Writing classes that I taught were offered by a department providing a variety of general courses in social sciences. As staff in that department, we shared our faculty room with colleagues teaching on other degree programmes, for example Business, Law and Administration, Fashion Marketing, Interior Design or Film. Chatting with my colleagues over cups of coffee, I often asked them about the types of writing that they required students to do in their modules. That is how I began to find out that students, who attended my writing classes focused on persuasive essay writing, were actually expected to write other types of texts depending on their degrees and the modules they were enrolled for. This new realisation made me feel uncomfortable: *I did not tell my students* how to write business reports, a press release or a case analysis in Law. I asked my colleagues how they assisted students in the writing of these different texts. Their responses echoed Luana’s quote: *they did not tell the students*, instead they seemed to expect that the writing classes would prepare students for the writing requirements in their other courses. This made me wonder: What do students gain from my general writing classes? What do they engage in when working on their assignments in other modules? How do they manage to respond to



the writing demands? What can be done, institutionally, to assist the students? This curiosity is at the foundation of my research.

This first chapter aims to provide a context for my study. In the second section (1.2) I explore different issues related to writing support in the UK higher education. I characterise student diversity and the nature of the ‘problems’ with writing that students are said to have (Section 1.2.1). Then, I move on to discussing research insights on the difficulty in understanding writing requirements (Section 1.2.2) and I problematize currently offered writing support in the mainstream UK university education (Section 1.2.3). The third section (1.3) positions my study with regard to research scholarship on writing support in the UK, outlines the specific niche that this work aims to fill and presents research questions (Section 1.3.1). The chapter ends with an overview of the rest of the thesis (Section 1.3.2).

## **1.2 Mapping the research area**

When working as a writing tutor and posing questions regarding student writing and issues related to the writing support, I began to be more and more aware of opinions voiced in the UK public domain regarding ‘falling standards’ (Street, 2004, p. 16) and students’ apparent low levels of literacy. At that time media consistently reported that ‘students’ ability in written language had ‘declined’ in recent years’ (Hutcheon, 2005, para. 12). This deficit discourse has not changed over time and even now newspapers continue to describe students’ low-level performance in literacy as ‘a puzzle’ (Morgan, 2014, p. 8). Becoming more familiar with the issues in student writing support in the UK and with emerging research literature on student writing (e.g., Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; C. Jones, Turner, & Street, 1999), I set out to conduct my study in one of the British universities in the context of UK higher education. In the following sections, I will discuss issues which are helpful in understanding the UK context of student writing support, i.e. the changing profile of student population, complexity of writing requirements and current institutional options of writing support.

### 1.2.1 Changing profile of student population (with a writing ‘deficit’)

Student diversity is one of the key characteristics of contemporary higher education in the UK. In the academic year of 2012/13 student numbers totalled in 2,340,275 with 425,265 being of non UK domicile status (HESA, 2014). This high student population comprises a blend of nationalities, cultures, ethnic and educational backgrounds and is a result of a move from *élite* to *mass education*. In the UK starting from the mid-1980s higher education has entered a period of unparalleled growth (Ivani & Lea, 2006), underpinned by structural changes, new political agendas and emerging international trends in student mobility<sup>2</sup>. The transformations, even though they have changed the landscape of tertiary education, seem to have preserved both an ideal of ‘the traditional ‘élite’ student’ (Lawrence, 2003, p. 3) and attached to that ‘an unspoken assumption that students already know how to write before going to university’ (Ivani & Lea, 2006, p. 6). Consequently, the academic performance of new entrants often unfamiliar with academic writing conventions have been described as problematic (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001) and conceptualised ‘in terms of scholastic deficits or a lack of academic literacy’ (Lawrence, 2003, p. 2).

To better understand the nature of issues related to student writing, it is important to consider in more detail the new contexts of UK higher education. Institutional changes in higher education have been introduced on multiple levels. First, in terms of the structure, the binary divide between universities and polytechnics was eradicated by the 1992 Education Act, which brought these two types of institutions ‘together for the administrative and funding purposes under one body, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)’ (Ivani & Lea, 2006, p. 7). This structural change was followed by significant developments in the area of teaching curriculum and programme delivery. Modular degree programmes were introduced which opened for students ‘the opportunity to follow ‘Combined Studies’ degrees and thus to combine courses from different fields of study’ (Ivani & Lea, 2006, p. 8). Additionally, new interdisciplinary degrees and professionally oriented programmes and modules were offered in areas such as, for example, communication studies or social work (North, 2005). Moreover, the developments in information technology

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<sup>2</sup> While in this thesis I deal only with the UK higher education, I want to acknowledge that similar dynamics of diversity and changes takes place in other educational contexts, for example in South Africa (CHE, 2000), Australia (Lawrence, 2003) or more globally in Europe, Asia and North America (Shavit, Arum, & Gamoran, 2007).

allowed for a shift ‘away from conventional face-to-face teaching and learning modes and toward the use of computer conferencing systems and web-based materials, both as part of campus-based provision and increasingly in distance courses’ (Coffin et al., 2005, p. 4). On the level of governmental initiatives, in the 1990s the widening participation agenda called for substantial expansion of higher education and increased participation of students from previously under-represented lower socio-economic backgrounds. More recently the government policy has focused on ‘fair access’ to higher education (HEFCE, 2003), and as such seeks to attract ‘gifted and talented’ young people into higher education by ‘raising aspirations, increasing motivation and by ensuring [that] relevant information on higher education is widely available’ (R. Jones & Thomas, 2005, p. 616). Finally, the internalisation of higher education and student mobility have contributed to increased diversity of the student population in the UK. In 2012/13 international students comprised approximately 18% (HESA, 2014) of the total student population. British universities have become one of the top destinations for those who opt to study abroad. International students choose to study in the UK attracted by the high quality of ‘western university education’ (R. Harris, 1997, p. 32) and motivated by the prestigious status of English being ‘the world’s predominant language of research and scholarship’ (Hyland, 2006, p. 24). The outlined transformations have had specific implications for the UK higher education system. In the pedagogic practice of working with the students, they mean that ‘teaching staff can no longer make any assumptions about the bodies of knowledge [and linguistic repertoires] that students might be bringing to any particular course’ (Ivani & Lea, 2006, p. 8) or field of study. I will particularise such issues below with the focus on academic writing ‘problems’ of specific groups within the new student population.

In the literature on academic writing in the UK higher education, student-writers are clustered into two major categories: ‘international students’ broadly defined as those who are non-native speakers of English and who come from abroad for the purpose of pursuing higher education in the UK, and ‘home students’ broadly defined as those who are native speakers of English and who have resident status under UK law. Although both categorisations are not without simplifications, it needs to be pointed out that ‘home students’ are often divided into ‘non-traditional’ and ‘traditional’ sub-categories. Lillis (2001) defines ‘non-traditional students’ as ‘students [coming] from

working-class backgrounds, those who are older than 18 years when they start a university course and students from a much wider range of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds’ (p. 16). In other words, non-traditional students are described by their affiliation with social groups previously and historically not included in higher education. In contrast to that definition, ‘traditional home students’ are described as those who seek entrance to higher education directly after they have completed their secondary education. Even though international and home students (both traditional and non-traditional) can be characterised in terms of their varied backgrounds, all of these groups of students have been reported to experience difficulties as far as written assessment is concerned (Lea, 2004; Wingate, 2015).

The difficulties encountered by international students have been perceived as related to their English language proficiency (Banerjee & Wall, 2006; Jordan, 2002), writing conventions expected in British universities (C. Jones, 1999; Peelo & Luxon, 2007) and specific issues such as, in particular, using sources and referencing (Barron, Gourlay, & Gannon-Leary, 2010). The research on student writing of home students explored the notion of transition to higher education (Gourlay, 2009; Lillis, 2001) and specific issues related to writer identity (Ivani, 1998). In this strand of research the focus has been on decoding students’ understandings and the expectations of academic tutors with regard to written assessment (Lillis, 2006; Wingate, 2012b). Researchers have also pointed out that current secondary education in Britain may not equip students with the competencies needed to succeed in university level writing. For example, Hardy and Boulton (2012) report that secondary school graduates ‘appear to believe that they are more prepared for ... [the demands of academic assessment] than they actually are’ (p. 18). From this discussion it is apparent that ‘students from all backgrounds entering the British higher education system need support with academic writing’ (Wingate & Tribble, 2012, p. 481).

In attempting to understand the issues related to student writing, Lea and Street, in their seminal 1998 article, suggest that it is helpful to move away from the emphasis on student deficit as in ‘present debates on ‘good’ and ‘poor’ student writing’ and instead ‘consider the complexity of writing practices that are taking place at degree level at universities’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 157). They suggest that the ‘problems’ with student writing should be conceptualised at the level of epistemology and not just

at the level of language or at the level of general writing ability. They see student writing ‘as being concerned with the process of meaning making and contestation around meaning rather than as skills or deficits’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159). In other words, Lea and Street define student writing as related to knowledge construction in a given discipline and the familiarity with a variety of linguistic repertoires that students need to demonstrate in order to respond to demands of written assessment in, often modularised, degree programmes.

A similar view is expressed by Boughey (2002, p. 295) who argues that both students and academic tutors are ‘seduced’ by the common-sense perception of students’ problems with writing as existing only on the language level. Instead she offers an alternative explanation and conceptualises these ‘problems’ as rooted in students’ status as outsiders to academic discourses’ (Boughey, 2002, p. 296) and as novices to academic ways of constructing knowledge and meaning. Boughey supports her position by referring to Gee’s definitions of:

a *discourse* as ... a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’ or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role (Gee, 1990, p. 143, as cited in Boughey 2002, p. 296);

and *literacy* as ‘mastery or fluent control over a secondary discourse’ (Gee, 1990, p. 153, as cited in Boughey 2002, p. 296)

In my study I distance myself from the deficit conceptualisation of issues related to student writing, and instead I build on the understanding of student writing as concerned with accessing disciplinary discourses and learning epistemological frameworks of a given discipline (I will further outline this theoretical position in Chapter 2). In my study I view student-writers not as those who struggle with their deficits, but as those who attempt to appropriate ‘ways of thinking, acting, valuing and speaking’ (Boughey, 2000, p. 281) that are required of them in their academic disciplines. To further explore the complexity of the task that is ahead of every student writer, that is the task of responding to the demands of written assessment, I will now discuss what is at stake when students attempt to make sense of writing requirements.

### 1.2.2 Making sense of writing requirements

In UK higher education, in particular in Humanities and Social Sciences, academic writing usually takes the form of an essay, and as such in research literature it is often referred to as ‘the default genre for student writing’ (Womack, 1993, p. 42). Essay writing took its prominent role in university education around 1960s when it started to replace final examinations as the key mode of assessment. An essay, written in students’ individual study time, was met with an increasing appreciation as ‘compared to the exam answer, coursework essays give students an opportunity to draw on a wide range of sources and allow time for sustained reflection’ (Hounsell, 1997, p. 106). Subsequently, in the contemporary higher education in the UK essay writing is pivotal as ‘it serves two fundamental purposes: it is both a tool of assessment and an avenue to learning’ (Hounsell, 1997, p. 106).

Essay writing requirements are communicated to students in a variety of ways: as spoken instructions given by a course tutor, through a descriptive brief, in programme handbooks or on university websites. Regardless of the channel and mode of communication, what constitutes an essay is usually conveyed through a set of common descriptors, such as ‘outline a clear argument’, ‘follow a coherent structure’, or ‘support claims with evidence’. Table 1.1 below gives examples of these common descriptive phrases:

**Table 1.1 Common essay descriptors**

<b>An essay requires you to:</b>	
a.	demonstrate your understanding of a subject area
b.	bring a wide range of material to bear on a given problem or issue
c.	respond critically, with your own ideas, to the issue
d.	organise your thinking into an argument
e.	select and use information to support your argument
f.	express your argument in clear, logical, well-structured prose
g.	reference all the sources you have used in constructing your argument

*(adapted from: StudySkills, 2014)*

Researchers in student writing have reported that such assignment descriptors, as exemplified above, are rather ambiguous (e.g., Haggis, 2006; Lillis, 2001). The ambiguity lies in terms used to describe a given requirement, for instance a phrase ‘demonstrate understanding’ can be problematic as different fields of knowledge may have preference for specific and characteristic to them ways of ‘demonstrating

understanding’, and conventions acceptable in one discipline may not be preferred in another discipline. Therefore, being familiar with a general denotation of given terms may not be sufficient for a student to be able to respond to writing requirements in a specific discipline or course. In other words, in academic writing, terms used in assignment descriptions have situated meanings specific to given academic disciplines (Lea & Gibbs, 1995; Street, 1999). The situated use of these terms can be compared to ‘codes’ (Scott, 2002, p. 94) that student writers need to confront, unpack, understand and engage with in order to ensure that they satisfy the requirements.

Lea and Street (1998) offer an example of how (un)familiarity with situated meanings of terms used in assignment descriptions can impact students’ achievement in writing. Lea and Street focus on ‘argument’ and ‘structure’, two of the most commonly used terms in essay assignment descriptions. The authors describe a case of a first year history student whose two essays, written for different modules but at the same period of study and textually constructed in the same manner received contrasting responses from respective academic tutors. The first essay was written for a module in history, which was the student’s major and was in line with his previous educational background. Drawing on his former successful writing experience in that disciplinary area, the student wrote his essay emphasising factual knowledge and classifying the information into distinct categories. He also used cohesive linguistic devices, such as conjunctions and repetitions of key terms, to ensure the textual flow of the argument. The student’s work received positive feedback from his history tutor and was appraised as ‘*a carefully argued and relevant essay*’ (p. 167, added emphasis). The other essay was written for a module in anthropology, which was the student’s minor module and in which the student was not an experienced writer. While writing the essay, the student followed a very similar format to that used in his history assignment. The student presented a factual, topic based discussion offered in carefully crafted paragraphs, linked together with lexical references and cohesive markers. In contrast to the history tutor, the anthropology tutor did not recognise the student’s text as a well-structured argument. The feedback given by the tutor said: ‘*You really have a problem with this essay, mainly for the reason that it is so incoherent. It has no beginning, middle and end, no structure, no argument.*’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 166, original emphasis). Lea and Street’s (1998) explanation of the striking differences in the reception of two essays does not draw on student’s unfamiliarity with general

features of writing, as the anthropology tutor advises. Instead, they suggest that the difference lies at ‘the deeper level’ (p. 165) of how knowledge is written in both disciplines: in history ‘clear summary of the facts in appropriate sequence’ (p.167) seems to be regarded as what counts as a well-structured and well-argued essay; whereas, anthropology ‘requires different conception of knowledge’ (p.167) according to which student-writers are expected ‘to abstract theory’ (p.165) and to offer an in-depth analysis of key concepts rather than rely on factual evidence as support. That explanation, however, remains unarticulated in the anthropology tutor’s feedback. His comments are ‘couched in terms of writing problems, so such epistemological presupposition regarding academic writing is hidden beneath more technical attention to supposedly generic features of ‘academic ‘writing’’(p.167) such as ‘beginning’, ‘middle’, ‘end’.

The situated meaning and the complexity that is encoded in the term ‘argument’, as outlined above, has been reported by many researchers (e.g., Andrews, 2010; Andrews & Mitchell, 2000; Coffin & Hewings, 2005; S. Mitchell & Riddle, 2000). Argument is described as ‘fuzzy’ concept with a multiplicity of uses in academic discourse. For example, it is used as a ‘philosophical construct of premises and conclusions’, or as ‘diverse writing practices’, or it ‘can refer to individual claims or to the whole text’ (Wingate, 2012b, p. 146). Moreover, as it is the case in the example from history and anthropology discussed earlier (Lea & Street, 1998, pp. 165-167), ‘what is accepted as a well-formed and valid argument in an essay depends on the discipline’s value system and epistemology, and there is a great variation across disciplines’ (Wingate, 2012b, p. 146).

In descriptions outlining academic writing requirements, not only the meaning of terms such as ‘argument’ and ‘structure’ is not immediately clear, but also the meaning of other, perhaps less technical terms, remains ambiguous. For example in Table 1.1 (see p. 21) point f. instructs students that in an essay they should ‘express [their] argument in clear, logical, well-structured prose’. Attempting to understand what textual quality can be described as ‘clear’, a student can be challenged by a plethora of options. Lillis (1999) illustrates ambiguity of seemingly unproblematic terms in her research work with non-traditional students in higher education. During one session,



she tried to unpack for a student what it might mean to ‘be explicit’, and arrived at ten meanings of that phrase.

**Figure 1.1 Specific instances of exploring ‘being explicit’**

Make clear link between claim and supporting evidence	Avoid vague wordings – <i>etc., lots of.</i>	Check that it is clear what <i>this, these</i> refer back/forward to
Make clear why a particular section was included	‘BE EXPLICIT’	Say why using particular examples
Show that you understand key terms		Say why particular punctuation used
Show that you understand key terms	Say how you are using contested terms	Link content with essay question

(adapted from Lillis, 1999, p. 130)

As can be seen in the Figure 1.1, the phrase ‘be explicit’ may denote, for example, ‘to make clear link between claim and supporting evidence’, ‘to avoid vague wordiness’ or ‘to show how you are using key terms’ (Lillis, 1999, p. 130). Providing a comment on the above example, Lillis (1999) offers the following explanation:

Explicitness is not a unitary text phenomenon. ... [The phrase] ‘be explicit’ raises further questions and demands further clarification. ... Being explicit in student academic writing involves learning how to construct meanings through a range of interrelated conventions, resulting from the particular socio-discursive context of higher education. (p.131)

Referring to Lillis’s work, Leung (2008) explains that terms used to describe academic writing assignments, even as basic as ‘essay’ associate meanings difficult for students to understand:

The ‘essay’ is in fact a very complex package of established ways of argumentation, culturally sanctioned principles of content selection, subject or discipline-informed ways of using language, text format and prose. ... [This] complexity is not immediately obvious to students. (p.154)

Leung underlines that the terms that are used, even though seemingly simple and unproblematic, denote meanings that derive from various academic disciplines, and that indeed the same word ‘essay’ can mean different things among different university disciplines. Academic tutors may use generic descriptive terms, e.g. ‘critically analyse’, ‘argument’, ‘structure’ but the level they refer to is rooted in disciplinary knowledge and ‘particular ways of constructing the world’ (Lea & Street,

1998, p. 163); therefore, as students are often unfamiliar with academic conventions, they find the assignment descriptions difficult to understand and are ‘confused about what’s required in their academic writing’ (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58).

The above discussion exemplifies that major problem in presenting academic writing requirements to students lies in ‘the fact that [academic] conventions are treated [by the faculty] as if they were ‘common sense’ and communicated through wordings as if these were transparently meaningful’ (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58). This way of presentation is hugely problematic as it takes discipline specific meanings for granted and fails to acknowledge that descriptive terms ‘are anything but transparent and indeed mean different things across a range of contexts’ (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58). This discourse of transparency is referred to by Lillis (1999, 2001) as an ‘institutional practice of mystery’:

‘Whilst the view prevails that [academic writing] conventions are unproblematic and simply ‘common sense’, I argue that [students’] confusion is so all pervasive ... that it points to an *institutional practice of mystery*. This practice of mystery is ideologically inscribed in that it works against those least familiar with the conventions surrounding academic writing’. (Lillis, 1999, p. 127, original emphasis)

Based on that discussion, it can be stated that assignment descriptions and writing requirements, even though usually neatly presented, often help neither in understanding what academic tutors ‘really want’ (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58) nor in guiding students in how to respond to the demands of written assessment. Students are, therefore, often left to *play the game of writing* and simply attempt to write ‘to the teacher’ or as ‘a teacher likes’ (Lillis, 1999, p. 131). Another possibility open to students enrolled for academic programmes would be to seek assistance in institutionally available options of writing support. In the next section, I discuss writing support provision that students are usually offered, and I present some of the issues that problematize writing instruction in the UK institutions of higher education.

### 1.2.3 Problematizing writing support

The origin of writing support provision in the UK universities can be traced back to the 1970s, when ‘communication courses’, focused on language support, started to be offered in vocational technical colleges. A decade later, in the 1980s, Further Education colleges and some of the universities introduced study intensive ‘access courses’ which aimed at preparing students for university study. In the 1990s, as a result of the expansion of HE, some institutions began to provide study skills programmes, which also included the focus on writing. The courses were designed for students who were seen as in need of language and study support and who in different ways were regarded as less prepared for degree courses. This institutional history has led the teaching of writing to become developed ‘as a form of support provision rather than a subject in the main curriculum in UK universities’ (Ivani & Lea, 2006, pp. 9-10). Currently, mainstream writing support continues to be offered in ‘Language Centres, English Language (Teaching) Centres or Units, or departments with various other broadly similar names’ (Jordan, 1997, p. 2). These support units are centrally located, have the status of non-academic professional services and are regarded as having lower prestige than academic departments. The provision offered by the support units comprise a high variety of writing support options, available for undergraduate and graduate students. Table 1.2 gives an overview of common writing support options available across the UK universities.

**Table 1.2 Academic writing support options in UK higher education**

	Programmes/Courses	Content	Duration
<b>While pursuing degree studies</b>	In-session writing courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic genres</li> <li>• academic style / language</li> <li>• referencing</li> </ul>	Up to 10 weeks
	Writing workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic genres</li> <li>• academic style / language</li> <li>• referencing</li> </ul>	From 1 to several consecutive sessions
	1:1 drop-in sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• depending on individual student needs</li> </ul>	Usually 1 session
	On-line courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language &amp; study skills</li> <li>• academic writing</li> </ul>	Flexible
<b>Before undertaking degree studies</b>	Pre-sessional EAP courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language &amp; study skills</li> <li>• academic writing</li> </ul>	12 to 4 weeks
	Pre-undergraduate foundation programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language &amp; study skills</li> <li>• academic writing</li> <li>• disciplinary pathways</li> </ul>	9 to 6 months
	Pre-masters foundation programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language &amp; study skills</li> <li>• academic writing</li> <li>• disciplinary pathways</li> </ul>	9 to 6 months

(adapted from Górska, 2012, p. 192)

As shown in the Table 1.2, the provision is generally divided into two options: students can take writing classes either while being enrolled for their degree courses, or prior to their studies on degree programmes. The first option (‘while pursuing degree courses’) was previously on offer mainly to international students, but nowadays the practice tends to be more and more inclusive as the recognition of writing support needed for all the students has grown (see Section 1.2.1 for an account). For example, a website of the support unit at Queen Mary, University of London describes writing courses on the In-sessional English Programme as following:

We offer a wide range of in-sessional modules which can help you to maximise your performance at university and improve the quality of your academic assignments. *If you are an international student*, and English is not your first language, then *these modules are suitable for you*. *Home students* who have English as their first language *also find they benefit from the academic skills that these modules develop*. (2014, para. 1, added emphasis)

The second support option listed in Table 1.2 (‘before undertaking degree studies’) is more commonly offered to international students who do not meet the entry English language requirements for UK universities. Sometimes, however, especially the yearlong undergraduate foundation programmes may be open for enrolment to home students as an access path to university education. This is often the case in, for example, science and engineering degrees.

Regardless of the seemingly abundant options available to students, the UK writing support provision has been critiqued in research literature with regard to the institutional factors that influence the institutional positioning of the support offered and with regard to the teaching pedagogy that the provision follows.

At the institutional level, the key weakness of writing support is described in terms of its separation from academic departments and none or limited input from discipline specialists into the teaching of writing conventions (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006). Hyland (2002b) points out that writing support ‘is often regarded as a ‘service activity’, shunted off into special units, and marginalised as a remedial exercise designed to fix-up students’ problems’ (p. 368). The writing courses are, indeed, viewed as targeting only weaker students who have been identified as deficient in their writing and who have been sent ‘outside of the department for help’ (Wingate, 2006,

p. 457). Another unfavourable aspect related to the institutional positioning is that the writing support provision is offered as extra-curricular courses that are not compulsory and that are not followed with any type of formal assessment. Additionally, the courses are not streamlined for academic disciplines, which means that in practice one group section of the course can comprise of students from a variety of disciplines and levels of academic education (Wingate, 2015). Experience shows (S. Sherazi<sup>3</sup>, personal communication, 20 September 2014) that this often leads to students' dissatisfaction, and as they regard the teaching content as detached from their specific needs, many students become discouraged and drop out.

In terms of the teaching pedagogy, the writing instruction in the UK higher education has been critiqued for being divorced from disciplinary knowledge and therefore insufficient in preparing students for addressing the specific demands of writing in their academic fields (as for example those discussed in Section 1.2.2). The teaching of writing in the UK draws on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which originates from the English Language Teaching and is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). EAP is subdivided into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). The EGAP is characterised as a 'common core' course and 'is more usually known as study skills' (Jordan, 1997, p. 5). Its main focus is on equipping students with skills helpful in engaging with different study tasks, such as reading for main ideas, taking notes, writing essays or reports. The EGAP instruction also incorporates elements of some general academic language use and usually emphasises 'surface language features (including spelling and a cluster of features referred to as grammar)' (Lillis, 2006, p. 32). The ESAP category of EAP is described as 'subject specific' (Coffey, 1984, p. 4). In principle it builds on general study skills support, and it aims to assist students in applying 'the skills they have learnt in the EGAP classes to the understanding of their actual lectures or reading texts, or in writing of essays and reports required of them by the department' (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, pp. 41-42). The division into EGAP and ESAP, however, tends to be more theoretical than practical, as in the teaching practice one writing course may incorporate both EGAP and ESAP elements. For the ESAP perspective to be implemented, it is essential that

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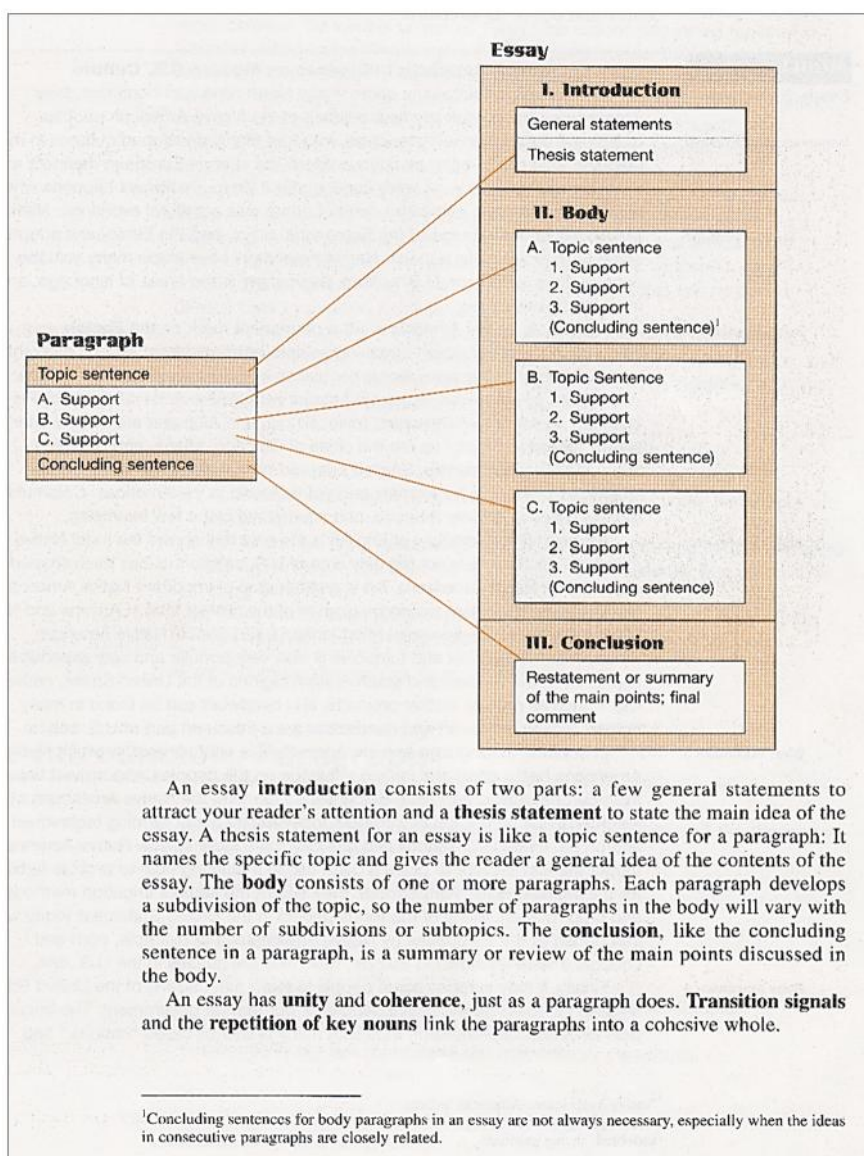
<sup>3</sup> Dr Saima Sherazi is a convenor of in-sessional support programmes at a university in London.

there is a level of cooperation between writing tutors and academic tutors, who are insiders of given academic disciplines. This level of cooperation, however, is rare in mainstream writing support, and the writing classes tend to be more *general* rather than *specific* (Wingate, 2015). The courses are prepared and taught entirely by writing tutors who are language specialists, often educated to a Master's level degree in English Language Teaching and who hold a professional teaching qualification. The writing instruction is underpinned by so called 'scaled-down universalism' which means that academic communication is taught in a somewhat hypothetical manner. Namely, it builds on 'language and communication inventory drawn up on the basis of teachers' and material writers' knowledge of what is likely to be said' (Leung, 2005, p. 127) or written in a given disciplinary context rather than on insider's familiarity with ways of communicating in a given academic field.

In terms of teaching materials, the ESAP/EGAP courses rely on commercially published guides and hand-books that are usually very general in nature, for instance: 'Writing Academic English' by Oshima and Hogue (2006) or 'Academic Writing Course' by Jordan (1999). In order to illustrate the pedagogic content of such materials, Figure 1.2 (see p. 30) offers an example and shows a page from Oshima & Hogue (2006, p. 57) taken from a chapter that introduces students to the principles of essay writing, with particular focus on developing well-structured texts.

The reprint in Figure 1.2 gives a visual representation of what an essay 'looks like'. The textual structure is presented at the level of surface features such as 'introduction', 'body paragraphs', and 'conclusion'. The essay structure is pictured as an extension of a short one paragraph text consisting of a 'topic sentence', 'support', and 'concluding sentence'. Additionally, below the visualisation of the relationship between the short one paragraph text and the essay, there is a concise explanation listing some rhetorical textual features of an essay (such as 'unity', 'coherence', or 'transitional signals'). The explanation describes an essay without any links to discipline specific ways of meaning-making and as such implies that an essay is a neutral and context-free text that, if follows the structure outlined in the example, could presumably be well-received in all academic contexts.

**Figure 1.2 From paragraph to essay**



(Oshima & Hogue, 2006, p. 57)

Apart from drawing on such 'how to' publications as discussed in the example, the teaching resources used in writing support classes may include extracts from research journals or from quasi academic newspapers. Original articles are usually adapted for the classroom use, which means that longer and more difficult sections (for example referring to research methodology) may be removed from the text. In some cases, the materials include ethnographically collected samples of students' work or disciplinary writing (Belcher, 2006). There are also corpora of authentic academic texts available on-line, for instance British Academic Written English. The use of such resources is, however, less common, and the support provision frequently disregards the fact that

scholarly writing ‘is not uniform and monolithic, differentiated merely by specialists topics and vocabularies’ (Hyland, 2002b, p. 391).

Wingate (2015) comprehensively summarises the issues that are most problematic in currently prevailing institutional writing support:

The generic nature of instruction [in writing support classes] trivialises and marginalises the role of academic language and literacy. Trivialisation occurs through reducing diverse academic discourses to a common template, and through equating the ability to communicate in an academic context with an ability to produce grammatically correct sentences. Marginalisation occurs through locating literacy instruction outside the subject curriculum, conveying a clear message that language and literacy are subordinate to content knowledge. (p. 35)

Researchers in academic writing have expressed ‘an intellectual and theoretical dissatisfaction with the deficit model and traditional study skills teaching’ (Horne & Peake, 2011, p. 104) that underpin current writing support provision outlined in this section. In light of that critique, it has to be pointed out that in some universities there are a few examples of pedagogic initiatives that attempt to offer support and that recognise both epistemological foundations of academic writing and disciplinary needs of student writers. For instance, Wingate (2015) reports examples from four universities, Cambridge, Canterbury, Durham and Lancaster, in which there are various initiatives that are based on and encourage different levels of collaboration between writing and academic tutors. The University of Cambridge, for example, offers discipline specific on-line courses in different subject areas (e.g., Economics, Geography, History or Linguistics) as a part of their *Transkills Project*. At the Lancaster University, the disciplinary support includes student learning advisors who assist their peers in writing in the fields of Management, Medicine or Science and Technology. Another example of writing support that attempts to address students’ learning and writing in the disciplines is the *Thinking Writing Project* at Queen Mary, University of London. The project is based on building partnerships between writing specialists and academic tutors ‘to embed writing development within disciplinary curricula’ (S. Mitchell & Evison, 2006, p. 71). The *Thinking Writing* has a university-wide presence, and contributed to the development of writing support in particular in the areas of Geography, Biology, Medicine and Engineering. The examples of briefly described initiatives are indeed inspiring, but regrettably however, UK-wide and broader ‘institutional frameworks within which [these initiatives] sit remain



unchanged’ (Lea, 2004, p. 751), and as such there is much need to re-think current writing support offered to students while they pursue their academic degrees.

### 1.3 My thesis

Student writing support is central to the research presented in this thesis. The previous section provided a discussion of the broader institutional context in which my study is situated. I focused on three areas: a) diversity of student population in new and evolving landscape of UK higher education, b) situated meanings and epistemological dimension of writing requirements, and c) generic writing support offered in mainstream provision. In this section, I move my account forward by describing a specific niche that my research occupies and aims that it hopes to fulfil. I also offer a concise overview of my entire thesis.

#### 1.3.1 Research niche and research questions

In the UK, issues related to writing support have been associated with two main strands of research, namely studies that *focus on text* as an object of empirical enquiry and studies that *focus on practices* surrounding the text production (Lillis & Scott, 2007, pp. 9-11).

The *text-focused approaches* draw on applied linguistics, genre studies (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Swales, 2004) and discourse analysis (Hyland, 1999, 2005). The research in these fields have ‘provided grounded insights into structured meanings of texts’ (Hyland, 2002b, p. 386) and offered detailed descriptions of textual and discoursal features of different types of scholarly writing. In line with this scholarship, the text-focused approaches view academic writing as genres and discourses specific to given academic disciplines. The insights yielded by the text-focused approaches have informed, to some degree, the EAP writing support provision, described earlier (see Section 1.2.3). Academics working in discourse and genre analysis do not fully endorse, however, the affiliation of their scholarship within the EAP writing instruction. They argue that the pedagogical adaptation of their research work, realised as the teaching of ‘discrete, value-free rules and technical skills useable in any situation’ (Hyland, 2002b, pp. 386-387) undermine their work and gives a misleading impression about the genres and discourses of the academy. In this thesis I draw on

some tools of textual analysis offered by the text oriented approaches (see Chapter 3), but I do not affiliate my work with this field. This is because my research interests, even though they also consider students' written texts, lie in broader context related to academic writing, as I will explain later.

The second strand of research that has gained prominence in the UK shifts the attention away from written texts to the *focus on practices* surrounding text production. This research is informed by New Literacy Studies (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1980; Street, 1984, 2009) and has contributed to the emergence of an Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998) which views academic writing as social practice. From an Academic Literacies perspective academic writing is defined not in terms of its textual features, as text focused approaches would imply, but it is primarily concerned with 'meaning making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in particular academic context' (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369). Central to the Academic Literacies approach is the recognition that writing is not learnt in separation from its social context, but that, indeed, the learning of writing is 'complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated and involving both epistemological issues and social processes, including power relations among people, institutions and social identities' (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369). As I am interested in exploring writing support and the ways in which students respond to the demands of their written assessment, I have adopted the Academic Literacies approach as theoretical grounding to my work (see Chapter 2 for an account).

UK based research adopting the theoretical framing of Academic Literacies has been undertaken on a diverse range of issues, for instance: transition to higher education (Gourlay, 2009; Leung & Safford, 2005), student-writer identity (Ivani, 1998), on-line/distance learning (Lea, 1998, 2007). In terms of researching student writing support, a 1998 study by Lea and Street was particularly influential as it provided a comprehensive model of approaches to student writing (see Chapter 2) articulating the importance of epistemology and disciplinary meaning-making as the basis for compiling texts in different fields of knowledge. In their study Lea and Street (1998) discussed a *telling case* of a student applying the same conception of writing to two different fields, history and anthropology, and receiving rather contrasting comments from his respective course tutors (see Section 1.2.2 for a description of that example).

Another study that provided similar insights on students' difficulties with understanding writing requirements was offered by Lillis (1999, 2001, 2006). Her work concerned non-traditional entrants into higher education and reported on students' issues with learning essay writing conventions. In her discussion, Lillis (2006) emphasised that students are positioned as outsiders of academic discourses and as such they need 'to be apprenticed to 'insiders' in order to learn culturally specific ways of meaning-making' (p. 35) expected from them in their academic disciplines. In addition to these two studies that presented exploratory accounts of students' issues with writing, Wingate (2012a) offered examples of two specific pedagogic initiatives underpinned by Academic Literacies perspective. The first study reported on students' use of on-line writing support materials prepared for modules in Management. The second study focused on embedding writing instruction into an academic module in Language Learning. Her findings in both of these studies share some similarities to those presented by Lea & Street and Lillis. Namely, Wingate's student participants expect instruction in writing as even though they undertake university degrees 'prepared for challenges to their self-confidence' (Wingate, 2012a, p. 30), they view the demands of written assessment as more feasible to respond to when explicit guidance and support is offered to them.

The Academic Literacies research scholarship on academic writing support, briefly outlined above (for a more detailed account see Section 2.4.1), can be described as exploratory in nature. Even though researchers have been concerned with issues related to student writing support, like the understanding of writing conventions or the suitability of certain teaching materials, they mainly focused on perspectives of tutors on student writing and perspectives of students on certain features of academic texts. A gap in the Academic Literacies studies on writing support is that these studies have not investigated what is actually happening in the writing classroom and what students actually do when they attempt to write. The methodology used by the Academic Literacies scholarship was 'qualitative in nature and of an ethnographic type' and drew on 'close textual analysis', 'interviews and notes from fieldwork observations' (Lea, 2004, p. 740). The interviews were either semi-structured aimed at exploring emic perspectives and they often adopted a 'talk-around-text' technique which focuses the interview conversation on particular features of a given (usually student's) text. In my work, I share the interest in perspectives on support and textual features of student

writing; however, my primary aim is to explore how students can be better assisted in their endeavour to respond to the demands of academic writing; therefore, I turn my attention to what writing support classes actually offer to students and how student-writers approach the task of writing. With those research interests at the centre of my thesis, I adopt the qualitative and ethnographic framing to my study, and I extend the empirical reach of Academic Literacies research to include the writing classroom and rather than employing ‘talk-around-text’ interview technique, I shift the focus of my interviews with students to ‘talk-around-assignment-writing’ to explore what students consider of importance when they respond to the disciplinary demands of written assessment. Taking into account the overall discussion offered in the introductory chapter, and in line with my research interests my main research question that I pose in this thesis is:

*What can be learnt from currently offered institutional writing support and from students’ own ways of approaching the task of assignment writing in their academic disciplines?*

In order to address the main question, I also ask four subsidiary research questions.

- 1. What writing support is provided to students in writing support classes in order to prepare them for disciplinary requirements of writing in academic modules?*
- 2. How do writing tutors on the one hand and academic tutors on the other hand understand writing requirements and writing support?*
- 3. How do students understand writing requirements, and what assists them in responding to writing requirements in their academic modules?*
- 4. How do students construct answers to essay questions in their academic modules, and to what extent do their answers meet academic tutors’ expectations?*

To find answers to these questions, I conducted a year-long study located in a writing support unit of a university geographically located in central London. In line with my main interest of investigating writing support provision, I chose a Pre-Masters Programme<sup>4</sup> (PMP) as the focus of my enquiry. The programme was offered as a full-

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<sup>4</sup> The programme name has been anonymised.

time diploma course combining writing support and tuition in academic subjects in a broadly defined area of Humanities and Social Sciences. My research sample comprised students, writing tutors and academic tutors. I collected a wide variety of ethnographic data, such as observations of writing classes, in-depth semi-structured interviews, students' essays written for their academic modules as well as any additional documents related to student writing volunteered by the students. I carried out initial analysis of the data during the process of data collection, and then I engaged in a more systematic analysis using a variety of analytical tools mainly from discourse analysis. Table 1.3 offers a brief overview of my research design, a detailed account of which is presented in Chapter 3.

**Table 1.3 Research overview**

<b>Research design</b>	
<b>Methodology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• qualitative: an ethnographic perspective</li> </ul>
<b>Research field</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language Centre in a university located in central London</li> <li>• academic programme: Pre-Masters Programme</li> </ul>
<b>Duration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 academic year (2009-2010)</li> </ul>
<b>Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students: 13 in total</li> <li>• writing tutors: 4 in total</li> <li>• academic tutors: 3 in total</li> </ul>
<b>Data collection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• observations of writing classes</li> <li>• interviews with writing tutors</li> <li>• interviews with academic tutors</li> <li>• interviews with students</li> <li>• students' essays and additional documents (e.g. feedback)</li> </ul>
<b>Data analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parallel with data collection, cyclical and recursive</li> <li>• spoken and written discourse analysis depending on data set</li> </ul>

By conducting my research<sup>5</sup>, I aim to add to the Academic Literacies scholarship and to the wider debate concerning what constitutes academic literacy and what institutional options of support could improve current mainstream writing provision. Overall, this study makes a contribution to knowledge by providing new empirical data from an under-researched context of writing support provision, in particular with regard to the classroom observations, academic and writing tutors' perceptions of writing support and the investigation of students' perspectives on what is involved in the task of answering writing requirements. Undertaking this research, I do not have an overriding and preponderant aim of developing a new academic writing pedagogy;

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<sup>5</sup> In the course of my studies I have presented this research at various national and international conferences as well as at academic and professional workshops. See Appendix 1.1 for a full list of my presentations associated with this thesis.

however, it is my aspiration to stimulate those who work in writing support and those whose policy making decisions regulate the support to re-think and re-consider the affordances of current writing provision offered in UK higher education and to initiate a much needed change.

### **1.3.2 Overview of contents**

Chapter 1 has offered an introductory discussion and articulated the aim of this thesis as being focused on researching student writing support in higher education in the UK. The chapter has presented issues of student writing support as related to the changing profile of the student population, the restructuring of higher education and modularisation of degree programmes, the epistemological nature of writing requirements and the current institutional provision as offering support that does not take account of the disciplinary nature of academic writing. The chapter has positioned this thesis in the Academic Literacies literature, outlined the research questions and specified the potential contribution of the study in relation to the Academic Literacies scholarship and the field of student writing support.

The aim of Chapter 2 is to present a theoretical foundation on which this study builds. It starts by signalling different traditions of academic writing research and as such emphasises the focus on social practice as a feature that distinguishes the Academic Literacies approach from other perspectives. The chapter establishes the theoretical framework of this thesis as underpinned by the social study of language and literacy, and it presents a detailed account of the Academic Literacies perspective on student writing support. The chapter also offers an overview of Academic Literacies literature in the area of student writing support in the UK and outlines how the study presented in this thesis adds to this particular strand of research literature. Finally, the chapter includes a theoretical discussion of discourse tools that guided my understanding as well as my exploration of different dimensions of academic literacy and of issues related to student writing support.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed methodological discussion and argues for the choice of adopting an ethnographic perspective for researching student writing support. The account in this chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part outlines the research design in light of research questions that guide the investigation. It presents

considerations related to the research field, research participants and discusses specific issues taken into account with regard to field relations and ethical considerations. The second part gives an overview of how different data sets (i.e. classroom observations, interviews and student writing) were collected in this study. The third part of this chapter presents the analytical procedures followed in the process of data analysis, and it offers examples of analysis for each of the data sets.

Having presented the background and the rationale for this thesis as well as its theoretical and methodological foundations, the next four chapters offer the data analysis and summary of findings.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the classroom observation data. It engages with three ‘telling cases’ of classroom writing support. Each of the discussed cases focuses on a different type of assessment that students were being prepared for in the writing classes. The assessment was related to students’ disciplinary choices and affiliation with specific academic fields, which was the distinctive feature of writing support sessions discussed in this chapter.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the interview data. While Chapter 5 deals with the perspectives of writing and academic tutors, Chapter 6 is devoted to the perspectives of the student-writers. The chapters are organised following the themes and associated with them sub-themes that emerged from thematic analysis of the interview data. With regard to writing and academic tutors, the discussed themes include: ‘writing requirements’ and ‘model of writing support’. As far as the students are concerned, the discussed themes comprise ‘understanding of writing requirements’ and ‘responding to writing requirements’.

Chapter 7 is the last of the data chapters, and it focuses on student written assignments. The chapter draws on ‘information rich cases’ and presents a detailed analytical discussion of a sample of a total of four essays written by two students at the same period of study and for two different academic modules. The analysis takes account of tutors’ comments on the selected essays, and the overall discussion of this chapter also makes use of student interview data as helpful in understanding how the students approached the task of essay writing.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter in this thesis, and it pulls together theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects of this research. It starts by synthesising the main research findings, and it moves on to highlighting how the insights offered by this study contribute to the Academic Literacies scholarship and to the field of student writing support in the UK. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the presented research and suggests future directions for further investigations. The chapter closes with some final remarks.



## Chapter 2 – Theoretical perspectives on student writing support

*‘Academic writing’* is one of those terms that is often invoked, usually solemnly, *as if everyone agreed on its meaning*, and so is used imprecisely yet almost always for what the user regards as precise purpose.

(Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006, p. 4, added emphasis)

In teaching as well as in research, addressing specific issues around student writing (such as how to open and close an essay or whether to use the first person) takes on *entirely different meanings* if the context is solely that of study skills, if the process is seen as part of academic socialisation, or if it is viewed more broadly as an aspect of the whole institutional and epistemological context.

(Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158, added emphasis)

### 2.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter I discussed factors that shape contemporary UK higher education in which student-writers learn, write and are assessed based on their written assignments. In particular I outlined recent transformations in the UK university system, the changing profile of the student population, and the situated disciplinary nature of writing requirements. I also characterised institutionally offered options of writing support as focused on surface text features and delivered in separation from students’ fields of study. Identifying my research niche, I adopted an Academic Literacies perspective and specified my research aims as oriented towards the exploration of student writing support and the investigation of what students do when they attempt to answer the demands of written assessment in their academic modules. Building my study on the Academic Literacies perspective, I took a theoretical stance which challenges the conceptualisation of writing as a unitary, context-free skill, and I aligned my study with the view perceiving student writing as context-related and grounded in disciplinary ways of constructing knowledge. As indicated in the quotes prefacing this chapter, what counts as academic writing can only be adequately comprehended when the epistemological and institutional contexts are taken into account; otherwise, what is meant by writing might be articulated without necessary precision and without recognition that different contexts evoke different meanings. Adopting the Academic Literacies perspective, which sees writing as a situated social practice, allows me as a researcher to explore *what is going on* in the student writing

support and to understand what (and why) students do when they approach the task of writing and attempt to engage in ‘*the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing*’ (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4, added emphasis) required when writing at university.

Taking the Academic Literacies perspective in the centre of my discussion, this chapter delineates the theoretical foundations of the study presented in this thesis. I begin by outlining international scholarship on academic writing research and by positioning the Academic Literacies in that scholarly field (Section 2.2). Next, I move on to offer an in-depth presentation of the Academic Literacies perspective as my research frame (Section 2.3), emphasising in my account the notion of *practice* and its theoretical implications for my exploration of student writing support. I further develop the theoretical framing of my study by foregrounding key concepts from the New Literacy Studies (NLS), namely the social view of language (Section 2.3.1) and social view of literacy/literacies (Section 2.3.2), and by describing a three-levelled model of student writing as conceptualised in the Academic Literacies perspective (Section 2.3.3). Then, I proceed to outline a research gap that my research aims to fill and as such to situate my study in the Academic Literacies research scholarship on student writing support in higher education in the UK (Section 2.4). In doing so, I critically examine the Academic Literacies research literature uncovering areas that previously have not been explored (Section 2.4.1), and I complete the theoretical framework of my work by offering a discussion of discourse tools (Section 2.4.2) that allow me not only to investigate *ways with writing* support in the social practice tradition of the Academic Literacies perspective but also to inform that perspective with my contribution. The chapter finishes with a concise summary and conclusions (Section 2.5).

## **2.2 Traditions of academic writing research**

My study, socio-geographically, educationally and institutionally, is located in the United Kingdom: I live, work and study in the UK. Researching academic writing in this part of the world is a relatively novel phenomenon (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; Ivani & Lea, 2006; Lillis & Turner, 2001), largely initiated by the recent institutional changes in tertiary education (see Section 1.2.1 for an account). Elsewhere, for

example in the United States, Australia or France, researching writing tends to have a longer tradition. Key approaches associated with those other national locations include *Writing in the Disciplines/Writing across the Curriculum*, *Genre Studies* and *Didactics*. As stipulated in Chapter 1 and in the introduction to this chapter, I align my research work with the Academic Literacies perspective, an approach to academic writing which originated in the UK. However, before I present the details of my theoretical stance, I will briefly outline other approaches as to some extent they have played a part in my thinking about writing support and researching writing, and they have influenced research on academic writing in the UK, including that conducted by scholars working in the Academic Literacies tradition.

*Writing in the Disciplines (WID) / Writing across the Curriculum (WAC)* – emerged in the North American higher education as a response to open admissions, a new population of students and the recognition for the need to support student writing (Russell, 1991). Even though WID/WAC tend to be treated synonymously, the terms can be differentiated based on their orientation to writing practices and teaching. The WAC movement promotes ‘writing to learn’ (Britton, 1970) across academic curricula; whereas, the WID is more concerned with writing *in* or *for* a given discipline (Devitt, 2008). Both WID and WAC view writing as ‘gradually developing accomplishment, thoroughly bound up with the particular goals and traditions of each discipline’ (Russell, Lea, Parker, Street, & Donahue, 2009, p. 401). WID/WAC have established an institutional presence through a variety of workshops, writing seminars and/or writing intensive/extensive courses. Additionally, WID/WAC put emphasis on ‘organised efforts to develop awareness of writing among teachers in the disciplines and their competence in supporting students in their writing’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 403). The concept of ‘genre’ is central in both WID and WAC. It is viewed either in a traditional manner as a set of identifiable characteristics of a given text or, more recently, genre is defined as ‘typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations’ (C. R. Miller, 1984, p. 159). The WID/WAC teaching of genre can be both implicit and explicit. The explicit teaching focuses on genre acquisition (Swales, 2004) or on genre awareness based on gradual process of discovery (Devitt, 2008). As a third option in a New Rhetorical approach, genre is taught ‘in the process of performing a rhetorical action in its target context of use – which is the situation in disciplinary classroom’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 410).

*Genre Studies* is an umbrella term for Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), the Sydney Genre School (SGS), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The RGS are associated with North American WID/WAC tradition discussed earlier. The Sydney Genre School has been developed by Australian linguists; whereas, the ESP is not allied with any national settings but is rooted in a global context of second language teaching. The Sydney Genre School draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978b; Halliday & Hasan, 1989), a theory of language, which ‘highlights the relationship between language, text and context’ (Coffin & Donohue, 2012, p. 65) by determining nexuses between linguistic forms and their functions and meaning in specific contextual settings. The SGS views genre as a social process achieved in stages and aimed at fulfilling certain communicative textual goals (Martin, 1984). Unlike the SGS, the ESP view of genre is not explicitly linked to any theory of language, but at the same time both approaches share textual focus on specific features characteristic of a given text type. In the ESP tradition, Swales (1990) defines a schematic structure of a genre as ‘a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes’ (p. 58) which are recognisable by insiders of a given discourse community. In terms of teaching pedagogy the ESP focuses on second language learners, and the SGS is associated with primary, secondary and tertiary education and targets underprivileged learners (Rose & Martin, 2012). Both approaches teach genre explicitly, in SGS by scaffolding and in ESP by focus on rhetorical moves helping students to understand ‘how target texts are structured and why they are written the way they are’ (Hyland, 2004a, p. 11).

*Didactics* approach to writing is associated with francophone educational systems. The term ‘didactics’ denotes ‘research disciplines that analyse content (knowledge and know-how) as the object of teaching and learning, related to school disciplines’ (Delcambre & Reuter, 2010, p. 17). As such, the didactic of writing (*la didactique de l’écrit*) is defined as ‘the field of discipline-based theory about the teaching and learning of writing’ (Donahue, 2009, p. 424). This academic area has a long tradition in primary and secondary schooling, especially in relation to the didactics of French. It became concerned with the university studies towards the end of 1990s in the context of the ‘massification’ of French higher education system and reported issues with students’ learning habits and with academic writing in particular (Delcambre & Reuter, 2010). *La didactique de l’écrit* distinguishes two groups of approaches to

academic writing. The first one is ‘based on ‘production techniques’ ... [which] envisage a transversal view of the teaching of writing, without referring to individual disciplines’ (Delcambre & Reuter, 2010, p. 24). The other group comprises of three strands of research: discourse genres (focused on textual analyses from traditional rhetorical approaches to those more context-sensitive), relationships to writing (researching how learners relate to writing in various contexts), and connections between writing and disciplines. The last orientation to writing ‘examines the relative diversity or homogeneity of university writing practices (which depend on the course of study) and the relative importance of the discipline with regard to writing practices used in the construction of knowledge’ (Delcambre & Reuter, 2010, p. 27). Scholars in French Didactics advocate the use of the phrase ‘university literacies’ (Delcambre & Donahue, 2011) to refer to academic writing, and they ‘seek to understand texts produced by students in a particular discipline as situated in social and intellectual disciplinary activities’ (Donahue, 2009, p. 437). With regard to writing instruction they argue that,

Teaching students to ‘write genre’ promises to become more difficult than ever. In the current shifting French context of higher education, this is a critical point. Rather than acquiring conventional [genre] moves, learning disciplinary genres can be considered a progressive adopting-questioning-modifying that entails critical membership in the fullest sense of the term. (Donahue, 2009, p. 439)

Different traditions of academic writing research, briefly characterised above, present rich international and educational scholarship on the study of literacy in the academia. The approaches mentioned in my discussion can be positioned, with admittedly some simplifications, on a continuum between a traditional focus on text (as in some WID/WAC or ESP methodologies), through increased consideration of context and social purposes (as in RGS/SGS/ESP or French Didactics) and ending with the focus on social practice. The Academic Literacies approach would be located at the social end of that continuum. It is ‘aligned with the view of genre [and writing] as social practice rather than [textual] genre knowledge in terms of disciplinary communication per se, although this is by its very nature central to the social practice perspective’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 405). The Academic Literacies approach does not discard the text as an object of empirical enquiry and pedagogic practice; conversely, tools and genre concepts developed by other traditions are often employed by Academic Literacies researchers in close textual analysis and in pedagogic initiatives (e.g. see

Street, 2009 for a 'hidden features' framework). The focus on *practice*, a term I explain more fully below, explicit in the Academic Literacies perspective, enables the examination of issues surrounding academic texts, for example divergent perceptions of students and tutors or contested nature of academic writing conventions, which otherwise may remain less visible or even hidden. By locating my study in the perspective offered by Academic Literacies, I can explore student writing support through the lenses of social practice and therefore with a broader consideration of what is involved in academic writing. I will explicate the specifics of my theoretical position in the remaining parts of this chapter.

### 2.3 Academic Literacies as a research frame

The Academic Literacies approach developed from New Literacy Studies (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006), and is informed by a number of different traditions, such as anthropology (Baynham, 1995; Street, 1984), sociology (Woolgar & Latour, 1986), applied linguistics and critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 1992, 2001, 2003). Allied to the NLS, the Academic Literacies approach sees academic literacy as social practice situated in a given societal and cultural context. Lea and Street, whose influential 1998 article on student writing in higher education defined the Academic Literacies approach, explain that,

Viewing literacy from a cultural and social practice approach (rather than in terms of educational judgements about good and bad writing) and approaching meanings as contested can give us insights into the nature of academic literacy in particular and academic learning in general. (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158)

Adopting a social practice stance helps to move away from the conceptualisations that perceive academic writing as ‘a unitary, context free activity, in which the same patterns and rules apply to all writing, independent of text type’ (Ivani, 2004, p. 227) and in which ‘the codes and conventions of academia can be taken as given’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158). Such conceptualisations prevail in currently offered writing support in mainstream writing instruction in the UK higher education (see Section 1.2.3 for an account). The NLS theoretical positioning, which sees writing as social practice, allows the Academic Literacies approach to underscore ‘the literacy demands of curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines’ (Street, 2004, p. 15), and on these grounds to define academic

writing in terms of the complexity of meaning-making processes specific to particular fields of knowledge. Specifically, the Academic Literacies approach recognises that academic literacy practices are, at their core, characterised by ‘the requirement to switch practices between one [disciplinary] setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes’ (Street, 2004, p. 15).

A key notion in Academic Literacies, that acknowledges ‘the socioculturally embedded nature of literacy’ (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 11), and that affords this new theoretical framing of academic literacy is the notion of *practice*. Street (2004) explains that it is the *focus on practice* that constitutes ‘the major point of difference’ (p. 15) between the Academic Literacies approach and other, more textually oriented approaches (see Section 1.3.1 and 2.2 for a description of text-focused approaches). The notion of *practice*, in relation to language use in general and academic writing in particular, can be explained in three specific ways or levels of abstraction (Lillis, 2001, 2008; Lillis & Scott, 2007). At the first level, *practice* is helpful in signalling that writing is not separated from, but indeed it is joined with people’s actions, that is ‘what people do - practices - in the material, social world’ (Lillis, 2001, p. 34). At the second level, the notion of *practice* emphasises the ritualised nature of writing: people’s actions (i.e. practices) tend to be habitual or repeated and in this manner ‘particular ways of doing things with texts become part of everyday implicit life routines’ (Lillis, 2001, p. 34) of both individual social actors and institutions as a whole. This has specific implications as it means that engaging with the writing of a particular text involves drawing on already established ways of accomplishing that particular type of text, which at the same time both preserves specific textual patterns and maintains specific type of social practice. Finally, at the third level of abstraction, *practice* provides a strong conceptual tool helpful in linking ‘the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help to shape’ (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 6).

By placing the importance on *practice*, the Academic Literacies approach has invited not only a theoretical move, as explained earlier, but also a methodological one. This has been realised in bringing ethnography as an empirical methodology to the study of student writing. ‘Adopting an ethnographic style approach’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p.

160) to the research on academic writing opened an avenue that allowed for the exploration of the sociocultural context of writing, ‘involving both observations of the *practices surrounding the production of texts* – rather than focusing solely on written texts – as well as *participants’ perspectives* on the texts and practices’ (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 11, added emphasis). In relation to the points made here, it is essential to explicate that the Academic Literacies approach, by concentrating on *practice*, does not dismiss or disregard the importance of texts. Indeed, it is the *practices around texts* that are considered and are of particular interest. For example, Lea and Street (1998) explain that, in their research on student university writing, a close linguistic analysis of textual material was ‘a major part’ (p. 160) of their work. They specify that texts were an ‘equally important source of data which needed to [be] consider[ed] in relation to the interview data’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 160). Lea and Street further clarify that taking an ethnographic perspective when researching writing indeed requires ‘merging the importance of understanding both texts and practices in the light of staff and student interpretations’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 160) of how knowledge is written in given disciplines and academic fields. It may be asserted, therefore, that in the Academic Literacies approach, text and practice are not exclusive, but even though ‘practice is [viewed as] *privileged* above text’ (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 10, original emphasis), both text and practice should be seen as complementary and similarly significant in empirical investigations.

Framing my study in the epistemological tenets of Academic Literacies opens, both theoretically and methodologically, an exploratory space in which student writing support can be investigated as a practice situated in a particular social context. Namely, I can investigate ‘actual’ and ‘observable’ writing practices (Clark & Ivani, 1997, p. 12), i.e. what tutors do when they offer support with writing, and what students do when they engage with the task of writing. I can also investigate students’ and tutors’ assumptions with regard to writing requirements and their perceptions and perspectives on writing support. Finally, adopting an Academic Literacies stance allows me as a researcher to investigate students’ written texts refraining from evaluative statements on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ instances of academic writing, but instead investigating texts through a social practice approach, I can draw on what counts as ‘valid knowledge within a particular context’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 170) of a given academic discipline and students’ programme of study.



Building on the notion of *practice*, detailed in this section, I will now move on to outlining the social view of language and literacy/ies as well as a three-levelled model of writing support inherent in the Academic Literacies perspective. These concepts are essential to theoretical foundations of my work.

### 2.3.1 Social view of language

Adopting Academic Literacies as a research frame and focusing on social practice implies drawing on the understanding of language as conceptualised in the New Literacy Studies. The NLS advocate the social view of language which characterises ‘the nature of language as a continually negotiated process of meaning making as well as [meaning] taking’ (Street, 1997, p. 51). Language as such is viewed as dialogic, interactive, dynamic and deeply rooted in social and cultural context in which it is used (Bakhtin, 1981; Halliday, 1978b). Gee (1985) explains that,

Language is always something that is actively constructed in a context, physically present or imagined, by both speaker/writer and hearer/reader through a complex process of inferencing that is guided by, but never fully determined by, the structural properties of language. (p. 27)

This explanation implies that the meaning conveyed in language is intrinsically embedded in the conditions of social life, and that it is negotiated and contested by the participants engaged in instances of communication and interaction. In these instances, the structures of language guide but do not entirely determine the meaning. In the social view of language, meaning is not considered as ‘something that is packaged in nice little bundles (words or sentences) and conveyed down a little tube-like channel to someone else who simply undoes the package and takes the morsel of meaning’ (Gee, 1985, p. 27), but instead the meaning is construed as dynamic and constantly ‘remade by [language] users in response to the demands of their social environments’ (Kress, 1997, p. 7).

Considering the implications of the social view of language for educational settings, Street (1997) suggests that ‘learners should be facilitated to engage in debates about the nature and meaning of language, rather than be treated as passive victims of its ‘structural properties’’ (p. 52). Taking account of this suggestion and of the notion of language as a situated meaning-making resource is particularly helpful to my investigation on student writing support. Namely, the social view of language offers a

theoretical platform for the investigation of what is at stake when students engage with assignment requirements, when writing tutors explain these requirements in support classes, and when my participants relate their teaching and writing experience in interview accounts. As explained earlier (see Section 1.2.2) in official discourse of higher education wording of assignment descriptions and more generally instances of language use with regard to presenting disciplinary conventions of academic writing are often taken as both commonsensical and ‘transparently meaningful’ (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58). Adopting a view that ‘language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; [but that] it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294) becomes then particularly helpful in exploring students’ and tutors’ understandings as well as institutional practices of writing support. I will further elaborate on the social view of language and its importance to the theoretical foundations of my thesis later in this chapter (see Section 2.4.2).

### **2.3.2 Social view of literacy/literacies**

Researching student writing support through the theoretical lens of Academic Literacies denotes affiliation with the social view of literacy/literacies. The ‘social’ signifies that literacy/ies is/are characterised as belonging or being a part of society and societal life. The difference between singular ‘literacy’ and plural ‘literacies’ is less obvious as it refers to what is regarded as theoretical and what is regarded as applied (Street, 1997, pp. 48-49). At the theoretical and research level, the term ‘literacy’ – singular – is sufficient as in itself it captures fundamental feature of literacy as ‘constantly remade in relation to the needs of the moment’ (Kress, 1997, p.115). However, from an applied and strategic perspective, it is useful to pluralise ‘literacy’ into ‘literacies’ in order to reflect that ‘literacy is not a single, essential thing, with predictable consequences for individual and social development’ (Street, 1997, p. 48). The term ‘literacies’ - plural - reflects multiplicity of contexts in which social life takes place and in which literacy is used by social actors (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivani , 2000). With regard to the Academic Literacies approach, Lillis and Scott (2007) argue that the plural form ‘illustrates well the position of ‘academic literacies’ as an applied field and, as such, having to face not only research communities but also the institutions where its users work and seek to influence’ (p. 16, added emphasis). In my work

adopting the Academic Literacies stance - in a pluralised form - becomes then important for two reasons. Firstly, it allows me to investigate academic literacy recognising the plurality and the existence of ‘multiple literacies that vary with time and place and are embedded in specific cultural [and disciplinary] practices’ (Street, 1997, p. 48). Secondly, the Academic Literacies perspective explicitly positions my study on the researcher-practitioner continuum so emphasising the nature of my investigation as interested in and directed towards applied settings of institutional writing support, which includes addressing tutors as well as students.

When investigating literacies and their diversity across contexts, New Literacy Studies offer two useful theoretical terms: ‘literacy events’ and ‘literacy practices’. The term ‘literacy event’ was introduced by Heath (1982) who characterized a ‘literacy event as any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes’ (p. 93). Barton and Hamilton (2000) add that ‘literacy events are activities where literacy has a role’ (p. 8). In other words, literacy events are particular activities happening around written or spoken texts, which means that ‘the notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in social context’ (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Literacy events - as theoretical lenses - enable one to focus on a particular situation where reading/writing or speaking is happening, and observe them happening (Street, 2003). Literacy practices, on the other hand, ‘are not observable units of behaviour’ (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7), but - as theoretical lenses - they allow one to consider the events and patterns of activity around literacy and link them to a broader socio-cultural context. Barton and Hamilton (2000) explain that ‘literacy practices are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them’ (p. 8). Based on this discussion, it can be stated that the ‘term *literacy practice* combines *events of literacy* and the cultural, social and political underpinnings that surround the event’ (Rumsey, 2010, p. 137). Street (2003) explains this interrelationship between literacy events and literacy practices in the following way:

We bring to literacy events concepts and social models regarding what the nature of the event is and makes it work, and give it meaning. Literacy practices, then, refer to the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural context. (p. 79)

In my work, the notion of ‘literacy events’ gives a helpful theoretical framing to the observation of the episodes and instances when tutors and students engage with academic writing and offer/receive support. Student writing as such can be understood as a result or a product of certain sequence of events that happen either in an institutional setting (e.g. writing classroom) or in a student’s own space (e.g. a study room). Literacy events allow for the observation of *what* is happening. The notion of ‘literacy practices’ enables taking the research gaze a step further and explore *why* the events happen the way they do. Literacy practices give a platform for the exploration of the understandings, beliefs and preconceptions about the nature of writing and writing support that cannot be observed in the events, but which underpin the focus, the dynamics and finally the outcome of a given event. The levels of abstraction (and affordances) that these two theoretical terms entail can be described by saying that ‘you can photograph literacy events, but you cannot photograph literacy practices’ (Street, Baker, & Tomlin, 2005, p. 19). In my work, both of those levels, i.e. events that are observable, and practices that are not observable, add to the understanding of what is happening in the writing support and how students approach the task of responding to writing requirements.

In addition to the distinction between ‘literacy events’ and ‘literacy practices’, New Literacy Studies distinguish between two models of literacy, that is an autonomous model and an ideological one. Both terms have been developed and theorised by Brian Street (1984) whose work, most notably, gave the foundation to the New Literacy Studies. The autonomous and ideological models of literacy are distinctively different. The claim behind the autonomous model is that ‘literacy in itself - autonomously - will have effects on other social and cognitive practices ... [enhancing] economic prospects [of previously illiterate people], making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’’ (Street, 2003, p. 77). The autonomous model presents literacy as ‘a universal technical skill’ (Street, 1997, p. 48) and presupposes certain deficit in those who are illiterate. At the same time it suggests that helping people to become literate will, in itself, improve their social condition. In other words, this model of literacy implies that literacy is neutral and universal, and that it can be easily transferred to any situation bringing desired effects to those who are ‘literate’. The ideological model of literacy, however, offers a different perspective. It works from the premises that,

Literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being. It is also always embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts. Literacy, in this sense, is always contested, both its meanings and its practices, hence particular versions of it are always 'ideological', they are always rooted in a particular world-view and in desire for that view of literacy to dominate and marginalize the others. (Street, 2003, pp. 77-78).

The ideological model problematizes the notion of literacy and emphasises that it is not *literacy in itself*, but *literacy as embedded in a particular context* of social, educational or institutional life that can be empowering to those who acquire it and use it as a resource in their career, at school, at university or at home.

The social view of literacy/literacies, outlined in this section, and in particular contrasting notions of autonomous and ideological models of literacy 'provided [researchers investigating academic writing with] a useful heuristic for opening up a critical exploration of the specific demands and practices associated with the academia' (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 11). The autonomous position on literacy has become associated with the current mainstream provision of writing support (see Section 1.2.3) in which academic literacy 'is viewed as a single and universal phenomenon with assumed cognitive as well as economic benefits' (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 11). The ideological position on literacy, recognising 'the socioculturally embedded nature of literacy practices' (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 11), has been employed in empirical research and in academic debates to work 'as a *critique* of current conceptualisation and practices surrounding student writing' (Lillis, 2003, p. 192, original emphasis), which contributed to the development of a three-level model of student writing in UK higher education. I will present this model in the next section and outline its significance to my study.

### **2.3.3 Academic Literacies: three-levelled model of student writing**

The 'banal and profound' (Street, 1997, p. 48) insights on the nature of literacy as a situated social practice, and in particular autonomous and ideological conceptions of literacy practices, have offered researchers a 'conceptual apparatus' (Street, 2003, p. 77) to empirically investigate and put forward different approaches to student writing

(Lillis, 2006). In late 1990s Lea and Street conducted a research project<sup>6</sup> entitled ‘Perspectives on Academic Literacies: an institutional approach’ in order to investigate issues related to student writing in higher education. Lea and Street (1998) explain that,

The research looked at perceptions and practices of student writing in higher education, taking as case studies one new and an old university in southern England. Set against the background of numerous changes in higher education in the UK and increasing numbers of non-traditional entrants, this research has been concerned with a wider institutional approach to student writing, rather than merely locating ‘problems’ with individual students. One of the main purposes of the research has been to move away from a skills-based, deficit model of student writing and consider the complexity of writing practices that are taking place at degree level in universities. (p. 157)

Based on the analysis of their data, Lea and Street subsequently conceptualised three approaches to student writing in higher education: ‘study skills’, ‘academic socialisation’, and ‘academic literacies’. Together the approaches construct ‘a three-levelled model for theorising approaches to student writing’ (Lillis, 2006, p. 31). The three approaches are described below (see also Appendix 2.1).

### Study skills approach

The study skills approach perceives literacy as a set of fragmented skills that can be acquired without being situated in a given context, and once learnt, it can be securely and unproblematically applied to any academic discipline. In that approach, academic writing is regarded as ‘obvious and relatively straightforward’ (Lillis, 2006, p. 32). The teaching is explicit and emphasises ‘the more visible ‘common sense’ notions of what academic writing is or should be’ (Lillis, 2006, p. 32). The instruction focuses on so called ‘surface features’, which with regard to academic texts include simplified elements of textual structure such as introductions or conclusions (Lillis, 2006), and in terms of language comprise spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure (Lea & Street, 2006). Lillis (2006) stipulates that,

The skills model assumes *transparency* in relation to language, and *transmission* in relation to pedagogy. Emphasis tends to be on language as a transparent medium, as a reflector of meanings – the idea that we put

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<sup>6</sup> The research was conducted in 1995-1996 and was fully funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

meaning into words – rather than on language as discourses which constitute whole areas of meaning. (p. 32, original emphasis)

The study skills perspective is associated with the autonomous model of literacy. It is implicitly informed by ‘behavioural psychology and training programmes, and it conceptualises student writing as technical and instrumental’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159). The issues that students may have with writing are seen as ‘a kind of pathology’ that have to be ‘fixed’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159), and therefore the writing support is seen as ‘remedial’ (Street, 2004, p. 14).

#### *Academic socialisation approach*

In contrast to study skills, the academic socialisation approach takes account of the disciplinary context of academic literacy. It recognises that the ways in which knowledge is constructed and represented, through genres and discourses, differs in various academic and subject areas (Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). In academic socialisation, as to some extent implied in its name, students learn writing by implicit induction: they are expected to ‘pick up’ writing as they study (Lillis, 2006, p. 32). A key assumption ingrained in this model is that the academia represents one cultural context, and that the learning of its homogenous practices, rules and standards will grant students a way of accessing the entire institution. Even though this model acknowledges some level of differences across the disciplinary fields, it mostly presumes the stability of academic genres and norms, and as such it does not take account of ‘processes of change and the exercise of power’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159). It also portrays ‘student writing as transparent medium of representation, and so it fails to address the deep language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the production and representation of meaning’ (Street, 2004, p. 14). The academic socialisation model is underpinned by constructivist education, social psychology, genre and discourse studies (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006).

#### *Academic literacies approach*

At the centre of the academic literacies approach are considerations related to identity, power relations, institutional factors and epistemological foundations of given academic disciplines. The academic literacies perspective draws on the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1980; Street, 1984), is associated with the ideological model of literacy,

and as such it sees literacy as situated in a given social context, dynamic and concerned with the processes of meaning making. The academic literacies approach emphasises the plurality of writing practices and suggests that these practices and linked with them academic genres ‘are not simply concerned with technical matters in which ‘appropriate’ skills are acquired and novices become members of an expert community’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 170). Namely, in the academic literacies approach genres are not viewed as transferable across contexts and stable but as emerging ‘in the relationship between the creation of texts and their associated practices in any particular context’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 10). Such a perspective is helpful in revealing that ‘participants in any particular writing encounter at university’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 10) may have different understandings of what is required and expected in a particular written assignment. For example, the hidden assumptions about genres, discourses and disciplinary epistemology can be noticed in feedback given to student by their tutors and in students’ interpretations of the received comments on their writing (Lea & Street, 1998). Furthermore, the academic literacies approach suggests that being ‘called upon - often implicitly - to switch between genres’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 10) is, ‘from the students’ point of view a dominant feature of academic literacy practices in the academy’ (Street, 2004, p.15).

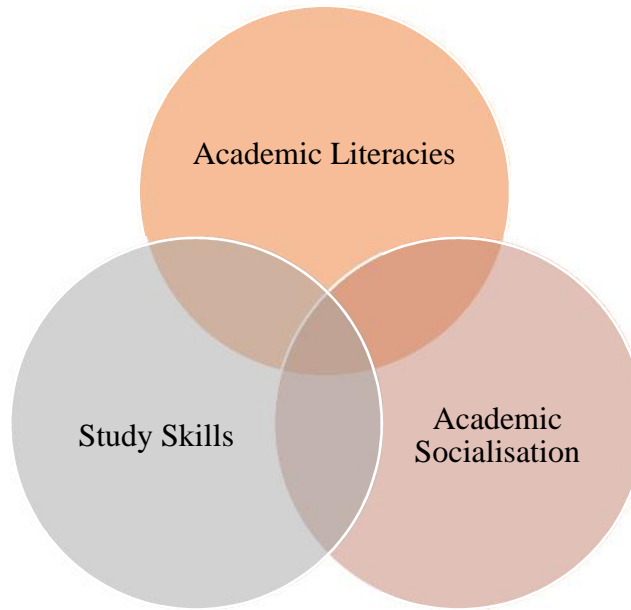
The academic literacies approach is not separate from, but inclusive of, the study skills and academic socialisation approaches. Lea and Street (1998) explain that,

The models [study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies] *are not mutually exclusive*, and we would not want to view them in a simple linear time dimension, whereby one model supersedes or replaces the insights provided by the other. Rather we would like to think that *each model successively encapsulates the other*, so that academic socialization perspective takes account of study skills but includes them in the broader context of the acculturation process ..., and likewise the academic literacies approach encapsulates the academic socialization model, building on the insights developed there as well as the study skills view. The academic literacies model, then, incorporates both of the other models into a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities. (p. 158, added emphasis)

Street (2014) offers a visual representation of the three models as overlapping circles (see Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1 The Academic Literacies model**



The relationship between academic literacies, study skills and academic socialisation is viewed as hierarchical, ‘privileging the academic literacies approach’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158). Scott and Lillis (2007) suggest that a distinction among the three models can be made using the normative-transformative continuum. They explain that study skills and academic socialisation, which draw on the assumptions of ‘the homogeneity of student population, the stability of disciplines and the unidirectionality of the teacher-student relation’ (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 13) can be described as a normative stance. The academic literacies model, however, with its focus on meaning-making, fluidity of writing practices and implicit assumptions about these practices, can be described as an ‘explicitly transformative’ (p. 12) model which can help to change, and not just replicate and reproduce, standard and dominant ways of engaging with writing. Such explanation of a ‘transformative stance’ is debated by Lea and Street (forthcoming) who argue that the transformation with regard to the academic literacies approach could be seen more as assisting tutors and students in being able to ‘conceptualise what is going on [in writing] more clearly as a basis for their own next activities which could be [a more informed or ‘transformed’] participation or challenge depending on their interests and the context’ (Lea and Street, forthcoming). A similar stance towards the understanding of how academic literacies can have the transformative impact on literacy practices in higher education has been put forward by Wingate and Tribble (2012) who challenged the dichotomy represented in transformational and normative positioning, and advocated for ‘the best of the both

worlds' stance. In my work, I align with the transformative stance in the sense of it being directed towards informing current thinking about what counts as academic writing, assisting both student-writers and tutors in becoming informed about the tacit conventions of academic writing and eventually in stimulating those involved in writing support to *transform* the provision offered to students in the mainstream higher education. It is by adopting such *transformative perspective* that I employ the Academic Literacies approach as a research frame helpful in 'interrogating the types of student writing provision' (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004, p. 35), in understanding what students do when they attempt to address demands of written assessment, and eventually in rethinking ways in which institutions assist students with writing.

## **2.4 Academic Literacies: research scholarship on student writing support**

As outlined in the preceding sections, in my work I build on the Academic Literacies perspective and explicitly place the notion of *practice* in the centre of my exploration of academic literacy (see Sections 2.2 and 2.3). In line with this theoretical stance while developing the research framework of my study, I have drawn on social view of language and literacy/ies as well as on a more nuanced constructs such as literacy events/literacy practices and autonomous/ideological views of literacy. Moreover, I have referred to study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies as three analytic approaches helpful in building a comprehensive understanding of writing practices in academia. In this section I take my discussion forward by critically reviewing current Academic Literacies scholarship on student writing support, explicating how my work adds to this scholarship and completing my theoretical framework by detailing specific discourse concepts I have used to explore and rethink *ways with writing* in higher education in the UK.

### **2.4.1 What is missing in the literature?**

Academic literacies, with its focus on practice and subsequent conceptualisation of academic writing as situated in a specific socio-cultural context of the academia, has opened a research space for the exploration of 'many dimensions to student academic writing which had previously remained invisible or had been ignored' (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 12). For example, researchers working in the framing of academic literacies have undertaken studies on identity and identification (Ivani , 1998; Ivani & Camps,

2001; Lea & Stierer, 2009), students' voice (Candlin & Plum, 1998; Paxton, 2012; Thompson, 2005), power relations and contested nature of writing conventions (Castanheira, Street, & Carvalho, 2015; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001), and transition to higher education (Gourlay, 2009; Leung & Safford, 2005). As the field of Academic Literacies developed, the work has been expanded to include other areas, for instance, the multimodal nature of academic communication (Archer, 2006, 2010), new technologies as tools in education (Goodfellow & Lea, 2005; Lea, 2013; Lea & Jones, 2010; McKenna, 2012), meaning making and rhetorical conventions of academic disciplines (Canagarajah, 2002a, 2002b; Paxton, 2006), professional academic writers (Lillis & Curry, 2006, 2010; Lillis, Magyar, & Robinson-Pant, 2010; Tuck, 2015) and other contexts in addition to higher education (Gilliland, 2015; Ivani & Satchwell, 2008; Michael-Luna & Canagarajah, 2008).

Amongst the multitude of research interests and investigations, I identify my own work as positioned with the Academic Literacies scholarship related to student writing support in the UK higher education. A review of scholarly literature indicates that, in this particular field of research, academic studies have been undertaken in three specific areas: exploration of tutors' and students' perspectives on academic writing conventions (Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999, 2001, 2006; North, 2005), development of alternative writing support offered alongside 'study skills' provision (English, 2011, forthcoming; Goodfellow, 2005; Wingate, 2008), and embedding writing support within content teaching and course design (Lea, 2004; Lea & Street, 2006; Murray & Thow, 2014; Street, 2009; Wingate, Andon, & Cogo, 2011). The findings offered by that body of research inform the understanding of the disciplinary nature of academic conventions and consequences this has for both academic faculty and student-writers.

The main insight offered by research exploring perceptions and practices of student writing lies in defining written academic conventions at the level of epistemology and identity and shifting the focus away from conceptualising writing as a skill unproblematically transferred across academic contexts and disciplines (Lillis & Scott, 2007). In particular, pioneering work by Lea and Street (1998) laid down 'a critical framework for theorising different approaches to working with university students on their writing' (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004, p. 35) (see Section 2.3.3 for the description

of the framework). Based on their findings, Lea and Street suggest that faculty members describe academic conventions by referring to ‘surface features’ of language and textual structure as if they were ‘apparently evident components of rational essay writing’ (1998, p. 162). This, in turn, has consequences for how students understand writing conventions across the disciplinary fields. Being unfamiliar with the epistemological underpinnings of such generic terms as ‘argument’ or ‘structure’, the students’ cannot ‘read off’ situated and discipline specific meanings of these terms, which prevents them from being able to address the demands of written assessment. Lillis (1999, 2001, 2006) reported congruent findings, and she referred to the vagueness with which the writing requirements are presented as an ‘institutional practice of mystery’ (1999, p. 125). Similarly, North (2005) argues, based on her work with art and science students, that the ‘academic performance [of student-writers] is affected by [their] conceptions of knowledge’ (p. 529) and unfamiliarity with specific ways of writing across different academic disciplines.

Another insight brought by research on student writing support indicates that faculty members may not be able to recognise that their knowledge of writing conventions is ‘tacit’ and ‘unarticulated’ (Jacobs, 2005, p. 477). For example, Lea and Street (1998) report that in their interview data ‘learning support staff questioned whether academic staff were aware that they were asking for specific ways of writing knowledge from their students’ (p. 162). Correspondingly, Gourlay and Deane (2012) in their study on student writing and plagiarism state that some of the librarians ‘hinted at a lack of knowledge and explicitness on the part of some lecturers’ (p.25). Based on their study aimed at embedding writing instruction into subject teaching, Wingate et al. (2011) argue that making conventions explicit to students, ‘can help subject tutors to turn their own implicit understanding of the discipline’s writing requirements into explicit knowledge’ (p. 74).

With regard to student-writers, apart from reporting on students’ confusion with disciplinary conventions, as mentioned earlier, research findings suggest that students have a primarily pragmatic approach to learning the writing conventions. For instance, in on-line writing support initiatives (Goodfellow, 2005; Wingate, 2008), which attempted not only to make the conventions explicit, but also to encourage students to critique them, the researchers found that students were less interested in the possible

critical aspect and opted to work with tasks that helped them to respond to specific demands of writing in their modules.

As outlined in discussions above, the studies on student writing support offer much insight into issues that are at stake both for student-writers and for those who teach them and assess their writing. The studies, however, are mainly concerned with practices directly involved in the writing of a text (e.g. the use of ‘I’ or a choice of text structure) and report on issues related to the student/tutor understanding of writing requirements. Wingate et al. (2011) attempt to expand that focus by including reading into designing their support initiative; however, they do not report on reading in their evaluation of the programme with regard to its impact on student writing. More recently, Hardy and Clughen (2012) investigating ‘communication failures’ (Haggis, 2006, p. 521) between tutors and students focused not only on writing but also on reading. Their findings suggest that students felt ‘intimidated’ and ‘anxious’ and considered themselves ‘not prepared for reading and/or writing at university’ (Hardy & Clughen, 2012, p. 47). They also had problems with understanding feedback as it included mainly general statements such as ‘you need to write in scholarly way’ (p. 47). Tutors did not recognise issues that students had and saw the cause of students ‘problems’ in insufficient secondary education or limited effort on the part of the students. They expected students to be able to read independently and engage with the content. The tutors also indicated that students ‘did not understand how important writing is ‘as the vehicle for their knowledge’’ (Hardy & Clughen, 2012, p. 47).

Reviewing Academic Literacies literature on student writing support in the UK, I was particularly interested in finding studies that were directly concerned with what is happening in the writing classroom and what writing practices students engage in when they write. Here I adopt ‘the term ‘practices’ to refer to different ways of dealing with writing’ (Camps, 2009, p. 131). As it has become apparent from the review of literature, the Academic Literacies research scholarship has, so far, been mainly concerned with exploring perspectives of academic staff and student writers and reporting on various writing support initiatives aimed at making disciplinary writing conventions explicit and accessible to students. The writing support classroom, as a site of research, and writing tutors, as research informants, have been less considered by scholars working in the framing of Academic Literacies. Moreover, the focus on

student writing seems to have been mainly on investigating choices student writers made in their texts or on exploring the issues they had with the understanding of the requirements. In the study presented in this thesis, as explained in Section 1.3.1, I aim to add new empirical data, which does take account of students' texts and of student-writers' and academic tutors' perspectives on the writing requirements, but which also investigates what is going on in the writing classroom, what writing tutors' perspectives are on writing support and most importantly what students do – what writing practices they engage in – to accomplish the task of writing. Exploring the under-researched sites, perspectives and practices or in other words: exploring *ways with writing* support in classroom instruction, through perspectives and practices of tutors and student-writers, and through samples of student writing, I hope to contribute to the Academic Literacies scholarship on student writing in the UK higher education and make issues related to institutional writing support *more explicit*. With these aims in mind, in the next section, I offer an account of specific discourse tools which, in line with the focus on social practice integral to the Academic Literacies perspective, complete my conceptual framework for the understanding of writing practices researched in this thesis.

#### **2.4.2 Focusing on *ways with writing* through spoken and written discourse**

As explicated in my discussion so far, my exploration of student writing support seeks to understand writing support practices through what is happening in a writing classroom, through perspectives of student-writers and key institutional stake-holders, and through issues related to the writing of students' academic texts. The notion of *practice*, which in its most concrete understanding simply means what people, as social actors, do in specific circumstances of social life (see Section 2.3 for a detailed account), is central to my discussion. In my work the focus on *what people do* is being mediated through the use of language and as such it means focusing on how people interact, speak or write while engaging in writing practices or while reflecting on their writing practices. In other words, in my work I view 'actions and reactions people make to each other as primarily *linguistic* in nature' (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2004, p. 7, added emphasis), by *linguistic* meaning that language constitutes a resource for meaning making and that a particular use of language can signal intentions, understandings and perceptions of its users in a specific social setting

or institutional context (Gee, 2005; Lillis, 2001). At the theoretical level this focus on language use is helpful in establishing connections between ‘contextual understandings’ (Lillis, 2008, p. 23) and specific issues related to student writing and writing support as represented in the use of linguistic resources. Bloome et al. (2004) explain that even though such focus on language may also constitute a part of analytical procedures applied to particular sets of language data, the focus on language is ‘fundamentally a theoretical one’ (p. 8), and it represents ‘an ongoing process of theorising (...) and of problematizing assumptions’ (p.8) about what goes on in instances of language use. In line with this argument, in this chapter I will outline theoretical linguistic concepts helpful in understanding how meaning is mediated through specific linguistic resources and subsequently how these linguistic resources are helpful in the exploration of writing practices central to this thesis. While this chapter offers a theoretical account, the application of this theoretical discussion to specific analytical procedures is detailed in Chapter 3 (in particular see Section 3.4).

Focusing on writing practices as mediated through linguistic resources I view language as discourse and in doing so I draw on the social view of language (see Section 2.3.1), which entails that,

Language is not a “transparent” vehicle of communication. Although language may communicate information from one person to another, it also is always an act of constructing social relationships among people and of bringing a cultural ideology to bear on an event, group or other phenomenon. That is, rather than examining a sign and asking questions about its meaning and use, one examines a sign (including its use) in relationship to other signs and their uses, focusing on the linguistic or semiotic system rather than the meaning of a sign in isolation. Meaningfulness, therefore, is located not in the sign itself but in the relationships of signs; their uses; and in the relationships of linguistic, social, cultural, economic and political systems. (Bloome, et al., 2004, p. 46)

Consistent with the above view of language, Fairclough (2003) defines discourse as a term signalling ‘particular view of language in use, ... [and] as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements’ (p. 3). Such definition of discourse corresponds to Gee’s formulation of ‘a Discourse with a capital ‘D’ as composed of *distinctive ways* of speaking/listening and often, too, coupled with *distinctive ways* of acting, interaction, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing’ (Gee, 2008, p. 155, added emphasis).

Working with the understanding of language as discourse, as outlined above, I do not engage with structural approaches to language which give importance to the description of ‘correct’ linguistic forms (Hyland & Paltridge, 2011; Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001), for example as in a Saussurean framework of language structures and the distinction between *langue*, i.e. a system or code, and *parole*, i.e. language use (De Saussure, 2011; see also Fairclough, 2001, pp. 16-18). Instead, I align my work with the view of ‘language as a form of social practice’ (Fairclough, 2001, p. 16), and I define discourse as ‘language-in-use’ or ‘language actually used in specific contexts’ (Gee, 2005, p. 19). As such in my exploration of *ways with writing* I focus on the functions of language as used in particular social contexts in order to mediate specific intended meanings of the interlocutors who are involved in specific literacy events. Emphasising the language use over the correctness of its structural properties, I focus on the ‘form-and-meaning’ (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94) relationship in discourse, that is on the use of language as a resource for meaning making. Working with such view of discourse offers a theoretical space for the exploration of writing practices: that is for the exploration of *what is going on* when specific instances of language use are employed to express, both in speaking and in writing, assumptions, understandings and perspectives that shape writing practices in student writing support. In the sections that follow, maintaining my theoretical stance expressed in social practice, I offer an account of discourse tools that are useful in building an understanding of writing practices both in spoken and written instances of language use (sections 2.4.2.1 and 2.4.2.2 respectively).

#### **2.4.2.1 Spoken discourse: representational view of writing practices**

A distinctive feature of my study lies in the exploration of writing practices not only through the espoused perspectives of tutors and student-writers, but more importantly through the exploration of support offered in the writing classroom and through specific activities that students engage in while responding to writing requirements. I gain access to these practices through spoken communication either observed in the writing classroom or offered in spoken accounts by tutors and student-writers. Engaging with these instances of spoken discourse and attempting to understand perspectives and practices as expressed through the medium of language, I draw on



elements of Fairclough's (2001, 2003) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and specifically on the aspects of his notion of *representation*.

The CDA is congruent with the social study of language and literacy/-ies (Lillis & Scott, 2007), and it is 'based on assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2). The Critical Discourse Analysis builds on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a study of language which 'is profoundly concerned with the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 5). The SFL, originally developed by Michael Halliday, emphasises a variety of linguistic choices that are available to language users when expressing their intended meaning (Fontaine, Bartlett, & O'Grady, 2013; Halliday, Matthiessen, & Matthiessen, 2014). It construes situated meaning making taking account of three perspectives or dimensions of language use, namely 'field (the topic), tenor (the roles and relationships of the interlocutors) and mode (how written or spoken a text is)' (Coffin & Donohue, 2012, p. 66). The main contribution of SFL is its description of language as a semiotic resource, consisting of three functional components, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language<sup>7</sup> (Angermuller, Maingueneau, & Wodak, 2014). Drawing on a Hallidayan perspective, Fairclough's CDA framework 'view[s] texts as multi-functional ... and talk[s] about *three major types of meaning*' (2003, p. 27, added emphasis), namely: 'action', 'representation' and 'identification'<sup>8</sup>.

Exploring writing practices through spoken discourse, I specifically draw on Fairclough's notion of *representational meaning*. Fairclough (2003) explains that instances of language use, that is the meaning-form relationship in discourse, can be explored from 'a *representational point of view* in terms of which elements of events are included in the representation of these events and which are excluded, and which of the elements are given the greatest prominence or salience' (p. 136, added emphasis). *Representational meaning* can refer to features and elements of physical

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<sup>7</sup> Halliday explains the 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' components of language use in the following way: 'Grammar is organised according to these three 'metafunctions': (1) representing ideas about the world ('ideational'), (2) facilitating interpersonal and social interactions ('interpersonal'), (3) integrating these ideas and interactions into meaningful texts, which must be relevant to their context ('textual')' (Halliday, 1978a, p. 263).

<sup>8</sup> Outlining how the CDA draws on the SFL, Fairclough (2003, p. 27) specifies that the three types of meaning: 'action', 'representation' and 'identification' correspond to the three Hallidayan language functions. Namely, 'representation' matches with 'ideational' function; 'action' can be compared to both 'interpersonal' and 'textual' functions; 'identification' is informed by the elements of 'interpersonal' function.

surroundings, attributes and traits of mental or inner world, as well as to qualities and characteristics of the social world. When exploring meaning in utterances through the lenses of representation, Fairclough (2003) advises that,

Rather than seeing such a procedure as comparing the truth about an event with how it is represented in particular texts (which raises problems about how one establishes the truth independently of particular representations), one can see it in terms of comparison between different representations of the same broadly similar events. (p. 136)

In the research presented in this thesis the notion of *representation* is particularly helpful in the exploration of student writing support and writing practices associated with student writing. As explained earlier in this chapter (see Section 2.3.3), student writing can be conceptualised differently depending on the social context and the view of what counts as writing at university level. By keeping my focus on how writing is represented in the writing classroom or in tutors' and students' accounts, i.e. which elements of the representation are included or excluded in the writing instruction or in students' and tutors' perspectives, I can gain understanding of how academic writing is perceived and how both writing support and writing practices are conceptualised in the instances of language use.

Apart from offering a general level of understanding of the issues described above, representational meaning, according to Fairclough (2003), can also reveal a varied level of *commitment* on the part of the speaker. Diverse levels of commitment (high, median or low) disclose perspectives and attitudes that interlocutors express towards propositional content of their utterances. In his CDA framework, Fairclough (2003) points to *modality* and *evaluation* as linguistic realisations 'of what authors *commit* themselves to, with respect to what is true and necessary (modality), and with respect to what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad (evaluation)' (p. 164, original emphasis). These two notions - *modality* and *evaluation* - can be associated with the SFL notion of a *tenor* which is useful in understanding how interpersonal meaning is realised, that is how linguistic resources are being employed in a particular situational context 'to express degrees of attitude, and to assess probability, usuality, obligation, inclination, and ability' (Martin, 1992, p. 153). In SFL *modality* and *evaluation* constitute 'appraisal resources': that is resources used for 'negotiating our social relationships, by telling our listeners or readers how we feel about things and people (in a word, what our attitudes are)' (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 26). *Modality* can be

specifically defined as ‘the area of meaning that lies between yes and no: the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity’ and which indicates ‘the speaker’s judgement of the probabilities, or obligations, involved in what he [or she] is saying’ (Halliday, 1994, p. 356). *Evaluation*, similarly to modality, shows speaker’s/writer’s attitude and reveals speaker’s/writer’s intended meanings that are ‘graded by degree’ (Martin, 1992, p. 153). In other words, this entails that speaker’s/writer’s ‘evaluations can be more or less intense, that is they may be more or less amplified’ (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 26). Drawing on both *modality* and *evaluation* as specific meaning making resources indicating speaker/writer commitment to a given representation is particularly useful in my work. The usefulness of these theoretical concepts lies in the fact that they offer a more nuanced picture of the *representational meaning* signalled by tutors and student-writers with regard to specific writing practices, and in relation to different dimensions of academic literacy such as ‘study skills’, ‘academic socialisation’ and ‘academic literacies’ (see Section 2.3.3) researched in this thesis.

Engaging with *speaker commitment to representation*, apart from considering modality and evaluation, I also, in the case of classroom writing support, take account of the *pattern of turn-taking* (Bloome, et al., 2004; Mehan, 1979). As ‘classrooms are social, interactional environments’ (Kiely, 2004, p. 225), the turn-taking pattern serves as ‘an interpretative frame for [tutors and students] to guide their participation and to interpret what is happening’ (Bloome, et al., 2004, p. 29). I specifically focus on tutors’ responses to students’ contributions, and in line with Fairclough’s (2003) notion of representation, I pay attention to what tutors choose to *include* or *exclude* from students’ contributions. In other words, I explore whether tutors ‘put constraints’ (Fairclough, 2001, p. 113) on what is said in the writing classroom. Such focus is helpful in understanding tutors’ ‘intended meaning’ (Mehan, 1979, p. 64) with regard to issues related to academic writing and their *representation* in the writing support instruction.

In the following sections I outline the theoretical concepts of *modality*, *evaluation* and *turn-taking pattern* that underpin the use of the *representational meaning* in my work.

Modality

According to Fairclough (2003) *modality* can be defined in terms of ‘the relationship it sets up between author and representations – what authors *commit* themselves in terms of truth or necessity’ (p. 219, added emphasis). Fairclough further explains that modality can be viewed as related to how speakers judge probabilities or obligations (e.g., Halliday, 1994), and how they express their attitudes to the propositional content of their utterances (e.g., Verschueren, 1999). Fairclough (2003) specifies that modality is often used to indicate ‘the ‘stance’ speakers or writers take towards representations, their affinity with them’ (pp. 165-166). Modality used to convey stance ‘creates and signals [the interactants’] relationships with the propositions they give voice to’ (Johnstone, 2008, p. 137). In other words, it can be simply said that modality indicates and reveals the commitment or certain weight that speakers attach to the propositions they make.

Fairclough (2003, pp. 167-170) associates modality with four main Speech Functions: Statements and Questions (related to exchange of knowledge), and Demands and Offers (related to exchange of activity). Modality associated with knowledge exchange is referred to as epistemic modality (‘modality of probabilities’); whereas, modality associated with activity exchange is referred to as deontic modality (‘modality of necessity and obligation’). Table 2.1 offers examples of each of the types of modality:

**Table 2.1 Types of modality**

<b>Epistemic modality</b>	<b>Deontic modality</b>
<i>Statements: ‘author’s’ commitment to the truth</i>	<i>Demand: ‘author’s’ commitment to obligation/necessity</i>
Assert: <i>The essay is ready.</i>	Prescribe: <i>Include the definition!</i>
Modalise: <i>The essay may be ready.</i>	Modalise: <i>You should include the definition.</i>
Deny: <i>The essay is not ready.</i>	Proscribe: <i>Don’t include the definition!</i>
<i>Questions: author elicits other’s commitment to truth</i>	<i>Offer: author’s commitment to act</i>
Non-modalised positive: <i>Is the essay ready?</i>	Undertaking: <i>I’ll include the definition.</i>
Modalise: <i>Could the essay be ready?</i>	Modalised: <i>I may include the definition.</i>
Non-modalised negative: <i>Isn’t the essay ready?</i>	Refusal: <i>I won’t include the definition.</i>

(adapted from Fairclough, 2003, pp. 167-168)

Examples listed in the table illustrate that ‘modality is a complex aspect of meaning’, and that it ‘goes beyond cases of explicit modalisation’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168), such as for instance modal verbs (e.g. can, could, may, might). With that in mind, the

key principle of modality can be articulated in terms of commitment to truth/obligation/necessity/act. For example, as far as Statements are concerned (epistemic modality), modalised cases are those in-between assertion and denial. Consequently, both a positive statement (e.g. ‘High level of literacy is seen as empowering’) and a negative statement (e.g. ‘High level of literacy is not seen as empowering’) constitute cases of modalisation. Another example of complexity of modality can be noticed with regard to Demands (deontic modality). Demands can be expressed through ‘question-requests’, that is ‘as clauses which are Interrogative in their Grammatical Mood ... [e.g. ‘Will you proofread the essay for me?'] and have the form of modalised Questions’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168). Another intricate example of modalisation can be found in the use of the tense forms (e.g. ‘can’, ‘could’) and in the distinction with regard to hypothetical and non-hypothetical modality (e.g. ‘I will proofread your essay’, ‘I would proofread your essay’).

As indicated above, Fairclough (2003) argues that the speaker commitment ‘depends upon the intersection between modality and other categories in the clauses’ (p. 171), such as for example the categories discussed earlier (Speech Functions, Grammatical Mood). Other modal categories that can be distinguished include ‘subjectively marked modalities’, defined as ‘first person statements’ (e.g. ‘I think the essay is ready’); ‘modalities that are not subjectively marked’, defined as ‘third person statements’ (e.g. ‘The essay is ready’), and ‘attributing statements to others’ as in reported speech (e.g. ‘I am told that you have finished reading the book’). Fairclough (2003) also indicates that modality can also be related to tense distinction (e.g. ‘can’, ‘could’, ‘will’, ‘would’), which ‘overlaps with the distinction between hypothetical and non-hypothetical statements (e.g. ‘I will write this essay’, ‘I would write this essay’).

Even though the categories outlined thus far illustrate the intricacy and the complexity of modality, the discussion would be incomplete without a cursory list of most common and archetypical markers of modalisation. These usually comprise the following:

- modal verbs (e.g. ‘can’, ‘will’, ‘may’, ‘must’, ‘would’, ‘should’)
- modal adverbs (e.g. ‘certainly’)
- adverbs of ‘usuality’ (e.g. ‘usually’, ‘often’, ‘always’)
- other adverbs (e.g. ‘in fact’, ‘obviously’, ‘evidently’)

- participial adjectives (e.g. ‘required’)
- modal adjectives (e.g. ‘possible’, ‘probable’)
- verbs of appearance (e.g. ‘seem’, ‘appear’)
- hedges (e.g. ‘sort of’, ‘kind of’)

### Evaluation

When discussing *speaker commitment*, apart from considering modality, it is also essential to consider the notion of evaluation. *Evaluation* refers to the positioning of the propositions in a text and can be defined as ‘explicit and implicit ways in which authors commit themselves to values’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 171). In other words, *evaluation* specifies ‘to what extent we believe what we say is likely, desirable, important, permissible, serious or comprehensible’ (Lemke, 1998, p. 33). Table 2.2 lists the main categories of evaluation and offers some examples.

**Table 2.2 Categories of evaluation**

Evaluative statements	e.g. ‘This is a good book’, ‘This book is awful.’
Statements with deontic modalities	e.g. ‘The values we believe in should shine through what we do for the poor.’
Statements with affective mental process verbs	e.g. ‘I like this book’, ‘I hate this book.’
Value assumptions	e.g. ‘This book helps to develop as a parent.’

Evaluative statements convey ‘desirability and undesirability, what is good and what is bad’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 172). They can be reified as relational processes and expressed by words such as an adjective (e.g. ‘good’) or a noun phrase (e.g. ‘a good book’). They can also be conveyed as other processes where the evaluative element is expressed in a verb form (e.g. instead of saying ‘He is a dishonest person’, one can say ‘he plagiarised his essay’) or as an evaluative adverb (e.g. ‘the girl was writing coherently and passionately’). Additionally, as an alternative, evaluation can be conveyed through exclamations (e.g. ‘What an inspirational story!’).

Evaluation can also be assumed. In contrast to self-evident evaluation (e.g. ‘good’, ‘useful’, ‘important’), evaluative statements can be discourse-relative, for example, ‘she’s a bookworm’ may include evaluation but only in a particular discourse (Fairclough, 2003, p. 172). Discourse-relative statements, with their implicit and hidden meaning, are of particular interest in my thesis. For example, a description of a student’s essay expressed in generic terms, such as ‘well-argued’ and well-

organised’, can only be adequately understood in reference frames of a given academic discourse and specific disciplinary epistemology. Adjectives ‘well-argued’ and ‘well-organised’ used with reference to student writing may in fact entail different argumentative conventions and different organisational patterns in different academic disciplines (see Section 1.2.2 for an account and examples).

Another feature of evaluative statements is that they are scaled. Martin and White (2005) indicate that it ‘is useful to employ the notion of values [as] being located along a continuous scale extending from ‘low’ to ‘high’, with various intermediate points possible between these two extremes’ (p. 16). In other words, semantic meaning of evaluative statements can be projected with varied intensity. This refers to adjectives, adverbs and some verbs. For example, an adjectival ‘sequence *contented* ^ *happy* ^ *joyous* ^ *ecstatic*, can be understood as representing a cline from the low intensity value of *contented* to the maximally high value of *ecstatic*’ (Martin & White, 2005, p. 16, original emphasis). Other examples can be described in similar manner: adjectives *good* [low] ^ *wonderful* [median] ^ *fantastic* [high], adverbs *possibly* [low] ^ *probably* [median] ^ *certainly* [high], and different types of verbs *like* [low] ^ *love* [median] ^ *adore* [high], or *copied* [low] ^ *plagiarised* [median] ^ *stolen* [high] (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 172-173).

Another category of evaluation comprises statements with deontic modality. That type of evaluation is linked to a sense of obligation. For instance, a sentence ‘The values that underpin our academic institution should be at the foundation of every organisation, school or educational establishment’ implicitly states that ‘acting on the basis of values is desirable, a good thing to do’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 173), and therefore it is people’s obligation to follow certain rules, values or customs.

Furthermore, affective mental processes and relational processes can be used to express evaluation. Evaluation in affective mental processes is usually expressed through subjectively marked evaluations (e.g. ‘I like this book’, ‘I detest that article’), which is similar to modalities that are subjectively marked. Relational processes, with the affective attribute, can also convey evaluation (e.g. ‘This learning process fascinates me’, ‘This learning process is fascinating’).

The final type of evaluation refers to ‘assumed values’. Assumed values can be described as cases of evaluation ‘without the relatively transparent markers of evaluation ... where values are often more deeply embedded in texts’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 173). For example, in a sentence ‘This writing guide helps to write essays and reports’, the verb ‘help’ triggers positive evaluation of the writing guide and implies that the guide is a useful resource to have when writing an essay or a report. Evaluation conveyed by assumed values may also ‘depend upon an assumption of shared familiarity with (not necessarily acceptance of) implicit value systems between author and interpreter’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 173). For example, to say that ‘Inner silence is a source of freedom, happiness and an inspiration for writing’ implies that silence is desirable in human life if understood from a spiritual/intellectual point of view and religious/educational discourse.

### Turn-taking

Attempting to understand how academic writing is represented in the writing support classroom, apart from drawing on the concepts of *modality* and *evaluation*, I also investigate a *turn-taking pattern* of classroom interaction. My focus is on a triadic dialogue, or in other words on a ‘three-part teacher-student sequence’ (Mehan, 1979, p. 52). ‘The underlying structure of the pattern is: (a) Teacher Question or *Initiation*, (b) Student Response, and (c) Teacher *Evaluation* or *Feedback*’ (Bloome, et al., 2004, p. 29). See Table 2.3 for an example:

**Table 2.3 Example of an IRE turn-taking pattern**

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(a) Teacher’s <i>initiation</i> :	And whose is this essay?
(b) Student’s <i>response</i> :	Veronica’s
(c) Teacher’s <i>evaluation</i> :	Yes, that’s perfect.

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The triadic dialogue is ‘a teacher-dominated pattern’ (Gourlay, 2005, p. 404) as ‘in this structure teachers get to initiate exchanges, set the topic, and control the direction in which the topic develops’ (Lemke, 1990, p. 11). Teachers pose ‘the question with the known [to them] answer’ (Macbeth, 2003, p. 244) and expect students to give relevant responses. ‘The criteria for relevance [are the teachers’] ... as they can disallow contributions which are not (in their view) relevant thereto’ (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 112-113). From this perspective, ‘a third act, evaluation, plays a significant



role in instructional discourse. While evaluation seldom occurs in everyday discourse, it is an essential component of an instructional sequence. It contributes information about the initiator's *intended meaning*' (Mehan, 1979, p. 64, added emphasis). When offering an evaluation to what students say, teachers have a variety of options that can be taken depending on the meaning they intend to emphasise in a given instance of interaction. Mercer (1995) lists five possibilities of how a tutor can respond to what students say: by confirming, by repeating, by reformulating, by elaborating and simply by rejecting or ignoring a given answer. *Confirmation* (e.g. 'yes' or 'that's correct') offers a positive evaluation and is usually 'a terminal act; it marks the final boundary of a sequence, ending one and signalling that another is to begin' (Mehan, 1979, p. 64). *Repetition* allows the tutor to attract students' attention to 'an answer or other remark which is judged by the teacher to have educational significance' (Mercer, 1995, p. 32). *Reformulation* of student's answer is helpful in offering 'a revised, tidied-up version of what was said which fits better with the point the teacher wishes to make' (Mercer, 1995, p. 32). *Elaboration* makes it possible for the tutors to unpack a student's statement expand it or explicate its relevance to the class. Finally, a tutor can *reject or ignore* 'wrong or unsuitable answers' (Mercer, 1995, p. 33).

The teacher talk 'occupies the public space of the classroom [and] becomes a resource for learning available to all students' (Kiely, 2004, p. 225). Therefore noticing whether tutors endorse or reject students' responses becomes helpful in understanding what learning opportunities are created for students. Moreover, depending which elements of academic writing tutors choose to emphasise or muffle in their evaluation moves, a certain representation emerges of what counts, in a given tutor's view, as a well-written text and what constitutes a desired response to academic writing requirements.

#### **2.4.2.2 Written discourse: from texts to hidden features of writing practices**

Seeking to understand *ways with writing* support, I have specified that my work adds to the current Academic Literacies scholarship by focusing on what is happening in the writing classroom as well as what tutors' and students' perspectives are on writing support and writing requirements. Moreover, I have indicated that, in line with the Academic Literacies tradition, investigating students' written assignments constitutes an integral part of my research (see Sections 1.3.1 and 2.4.1). More specifically, my

work aims to understand how students construct answers to essay questions and whether the texts produced by them fulfil the expectations of their academic tutors. I build my theoretical understanding of these issues viewing student writing as social practice. Namely, at the theoretical level, my conceptualisation of student writing endorses the Academic Literacies perspective (see Section 2.3) and as such privileges the *practice* but also emphasises the importance of *written texts* in achieving a comprehensive understanding of what is at stake when students write for academic purposes.

Drawing on the understanding of literacy as social practice, in my work I bridge *practice* and *texts* (Lillis 2009) by employing Street's (2009) 'hidden features' framework to the understanding of both how texts are structured, and how texts operate as specific writing practices in given academic disciplines. Street's 'hidden features' framework is a heuristic which emphasises salient benchmarks 'that are called upon in judgements of academic writing [and] that often remain implicit' (p.1) and unarticulated. This framework was designed as 'a set of working concepts' (Street, 2009, p. 1) that takes the focus away from 'formulaic lists of things to be covered, usually in terms of the structure of the essay' (Street, 2009, p. 1) and instead underscores implicit criteria used by those who assess student writing. The 'hidden features' are informed by the considerations of rhetorical genre structure (Bazerman & Prior, 2003) and other rhetorical devices that make the text readable, keep the audience engaged and reveal the writer's position on issues discussed in the text (Blommaert, 2005; Hyland, 1999). The framework is not prescriptive, but rather offers a situated and context specific perspective on what assessors expect from student academic writing. Street (personal communication, 18 November 2014) advises that a list of particular genre and rhetorical features included in his 2009 article (e.g. 'structure', 'opening', 'contribution', 'conclusions', 'signalling', 'stance') represents 'what emerged from a particular class; others will be different'. With that in mind, applying the 'hidden features' way of thinking to developing my own criteria suitable for the understanding of students' writing practices in my study, I followed Street's (2009) general focus on genre, text readability, authorship and reader-writer relationship, but I adjusted the particularities of each of these features having in mind the educational level of my student participants. I explain this below in more detail,

referring to both macro features of textual structure and micro features of academic prose.

### Argument – features of text structure

As explained in my introductory chapter (see Chapter 1), argumentative essays constitute ‘the most common genre’ (Wingate, 2012b, p. 145) of student writing in Social Sciences in the UK higher education (see Section 1.2.2 for an account). That type of academic genre is also central to my investigation. The argumentative essay requires students to ‘demonstrate the ability to develop and sustain an argument, supported by reasoning and evidence’ (Nesi & Gardner, 2012p. 80). Working with students’ essays, I draw on Genre Studies and view texts as concerned with achieving certain communicative purposes through schematic structure of written discourse (Swales, 1990). In this view of genre, ‘texts are distinguished according to their goal orientations and examined to determine how they are structured to achieve specific ends’ (Hyland, 1990, pp. 67-68). Engaging with students’ texts, I rely on Hyland’s description of the argumentative essay structure. Hyland (1990) explains that the argumentative essay ‘is characterised by a three stage structure which represents the organising principles of the genre: Thesis, Argument and Conclusions’ (p.68). The three main stages have their own internal organisation achieved by a series of rhetorical moves, each of which serves a specific communicative function aimed at accomplishing a given communicative purpose of particular genre (Swales, 1990, 2004). A stage usually consist of a series of compulsory and optional moves ‘realised in various ways at the level of form by lexical and grammatical means’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 68). Below I offer a description of Hyland’s rhetorical model of argumentative essay structure (see also Appendix 2.2).

### Argumentative essay structure

*The Thesis Stage* ‘introduces the discourse topic and advances the writer’s proposition or central statement’ (Hyland, 1990, p.70). It usually consists of five moves, although only one (i.e. ‘proposition’) is obligatory.

1. *Gambit*: its role is to ‘capture the reader’s attention’ and ‘impress’ so that the text becomes interesting to them, and they engage with reading (Hyland, 1990, p. 70).
2. *Information*: provides background information in order contextualise the topic; usually includes definitions, typologies, classifications, descriptions, or critiques.

3. *Proposition*: ‘functions to furnish a specific statement of position which defines the topic and gives a focus to the entire composition’ (Hyland, 1990, pp. 70-71); is succinct but may also be more descriptive emerging from the information move.
4. *Evaluation*: offers a positive comment on the proposition.
5. *Marker*: ‘structures the discourse by signposting its subsequent direction’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 71).

*The Argument Stage* ‘presents the infrastructure of reasons which characterise the genre’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 72). It involves three obligatory moves (‘marker’, ‘claim’, ‘support’) and one optional (‘restatement’); the cycle of compulsory moves can be repeated indeterminately.

1. *Marker*: ‘frames the sequence and connects it to both the steps in the argument and to the proposition’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 72); can be achieved implicitly (by changing a topic included in the claim) or explicitly (by the use of listing signals, e.g. ‘first’, ‘second’, ‘next’ or by transition signals, e.g. ‘however’, ‘another reason’).
2. *Restatement*: reiterates the proposition reminding the reader of the subject.
3. *Claim*: is central to the argument and offers ‘a reason endorsing the validity of the proposition’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 72); can be achieved by ‘appealing to the potency of ‘shared’ presuppositions or expectations about the topic’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 72), offering a generalisation based on specialised sources or concrete evidence or solid facts, or finally it can declare the writer’s opinion ‘for maximum effect with minimum regard for opposing views’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 73).
4. *Support*: is an essential move providing ‘explicit reinforcement for the claim’; it is evidence based and ‘seeks to demonstrate the relevance of the claim to the proposition’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 73).

*The Conclusion Stage* ‘functions to consolidate the discourse and retrospectively affirm what has been communicated’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 74); consists of three obligatory moves (‘marker’, ‘affirmation’, ‘close’) and one compulsory (‘consolidation’)

1. *Marker*: signals the concluding boundary; usually expressed by a marker, e.g. ‘to conclude’, ‘the understanding to be drawn is...’.
2. *Consolidation*: is essential to the conclusions stage and ‘refers back to the content of the argument section to relate the themes of the argument stage with the proposition’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 74).
3. *Affirmation*: repeats the proposition.
4. *Close*: provides a prospective rather than a retrospective focus and extends to other aspects of the topic in order to broaden the context of the discussion.

The argumentative essay structure, as outlined above, can be considered a ‘hidden feature’ as tutors often have only implied understanding of ‘the most important elements to look for in students’ writing’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 162), and they are usually less able to explicitly describe rhetorical features of a given text type. Hyland

(1990) states that ‘we reward good work when we see it, but without a clear awareness of what is required to achieve it’ (p.66).

The rhetorical genre structure constitutes ‘an important part of the meanings of texts’ (Hyland, 1990, p. 66). It can be argued that in the case of an argumentative essay an ‘effective argument is as much a matter of organisation as content or creativity and constructing meaning involves developing rhetorical steps. In other words, to argue *is* to express ideas in these particular ways’ (Hyland, 1990, pp. 76-77, original emphasis). In line with this assertion, engaging with students’ essays by paying attention to specific genre moves can be helpful in developing understanding whether students’ texts, by adhering to rhetorical structure, present a coherent and convincing argument. In my work, taking a social practice stance, I seek to deepen this understanding by informing it with the focus on *practice*, that is by reading students’ texts while taking account of perspectives on these texts offered by both tutors and student-writers. Combining the focus on text with the focus on *practice* is of value for two reasons. First, by referring to tutors’ comments I can gain an understanding of whether students’ essays were recognised by their tutors as ‘carefully argued and relevant’ (Lea and Street, 1990, p. 167). Second, by drawing on students’ accounts I can gain an understanding of how the students approached the task of writing and whether their writing practices assisted them in responding to the writing demands of the assessment.

#### Argument - features of academic prose

Street’s (2009) ‘hidden features’ framework, in addition to focusing on genre, emphasises issues related to rhetorical aspects of academic prose that assure text readability, address the audience and point to writer’s position. Engaging with these elements of student writing, I draw on selected elements of Hyland’s (2005) metadiscourse, namely ‘transitions’, ‘frame markers’, evidentials’, ‘hedges’. I also use Nunan’s (1993) notion of ‘demonstrative reference’. With regard to the metadiscourse, its elements are useful as metadiscourse offers a detailed characterisation of a ‘range of devices writers use to explicitly organise their texts, engage readers, and signal their attitudes to both their material and their audience’ (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 156). As far as the demonstrative reference is concerned, I regard it as useful because it contributes to textual coherence and enables the writer

‘to establish relationships across sentence[s]’ (Nunan, 1993, p. 21). The rhetorical devices employed in my work and used to conceptualise features of academic prose in argumentative essays are briefly characterised below:

- ~ *Transitions*: signal clausal relations and ‘help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument’ (Hyland, 2005, p. 50). For a given rhetorical device to perform a metadiscoursal role of a transition marker, it must contribute to the internal dynamics of the discourse by ‘helping the reader interpret links between ideas’ (Hyland, 2005, p. 50). [Examples: ‘in addition’, ‘but’, ‘thus’]
- ~ *Frame markers*: have the role of signalling textual boundaries or indicating particular elements in the schematic text structure. They can be employed ‘to sequence parts of the text’, ‘to internally order an argument’, ‘to explicitly label text stages’, or ‘to indicate topic shifts’ (Hyland, 2005, p. 51). [Examples: ‘my purpose is’, ‘to conclude’]
- ~ *Evidentials*: comprise metalinguistic devices that aid the writer in representing ideas from other sources; their role is to ‘guide the reader’s interpretation and establish an authorial command of the subject’ (Hyland, 2005, p. 51). In case of academic writing, evidentials refer to scholarly literature and help to substantiate writer’s arguments. [Examples: ‘according to x’, ‘y explains that’]
- ~ *Hedges*: convey writer’s subjectivity and signal the withdrawal of full commitment to given propositions or assertions; they can be seen as devices that protect the writer in cases when propositions and assertions are attributable to ‘plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge, indicating the degree of confidence it is prudent to attribute to [them]’ (Hyland, 2005, p. 51). [Examples: ‘possible’, ‘might’, ‘perhaps’]
- ~ *Demonstrative reference*: is a part of textual cohesion and enables the writer ‘to make multiple references to people or things within a text’ (Nunan, 1993, p. 23). It is realised through determiners and adverbs which can be used to ‘represent a single word or phrase, or much longer chunks of text’ (Nunan, 1993, p. 23). [Examples: ‘this’, ‘these’]

Hyland (2004b) argues that ‘effective argument involves a community-oriented deployment of appropriate linguistics resources to represent writers, their texts, and their readers’ (p. 148). In other words, writer’s negotiation of an argument, position taken towards given propositions and engagement with the reader ‘is closely linked to the norms and expectations of particular cultural and professional communities’ (Hyland, 2004b, p. 148). Tutors often have only implicit knowledge of how rhetorical devices contribute to the ways of writing in their disciplines. Their understanding is frequently shaped by their own ‘disciplinary histories’ (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 162) rather than by their explicit familiarity with the conventions. On this basis, therefore, it can be said that rhetorical devices constitute ‘hidden features’ which tutors refer to when assessing students’ writing but are less able to articulate how these features are actually deployed to construct an effective argument. Based on that discussion, it can

be also stated that incipient writers, who are unfamiliar with the situated and contextual uses of rhetorical devices, tend to be at risk of lowering the quality of their argumentation by an inappropriate application of rhetorical tools. Working with these textual features of academic prose, I extend my understanding by focusing on *practice*, that is by informing my understanding with accounts offered by both students' and tutors' with regard to what they perceive as a well-written academic prose. This consistent focus on *practice* allows me in my work to view student writing through the theoretical lens of Academic Literacies and eventually to inform the Academic Literacies scholarship on student writing support with my own contribution.

## 2.5 Summary and conclusions

The discussion offered in this chapter provided a broader context to my study and presented theoretical concepts that constitute the foundation to the research presented in this thesis. My account centred on the Academic Literacies approach which, together with the social view of language and literacy, will assist me in investigating institutional practices of writing support, contested understandings of tutors and students of what counts as academic writing, and finally in investigating what students do when they try to write academically approved texts.

Building on the Academic Literacies approach, which views language as social practice, in this chapter I have also outlined discourse tools which are helpful in my work while investigating writing practices and student writing support. In particular, I have presented Fairclough's (2003) notion of representational meaning and related to it markers of modality, evaluation and patterns of turn-taking (Mehan, 1979). Furthermore, I have characterised 'hidden features' of academic writing (Street 2009) by referring to Hyland's (1990) argumentative essay model as well as to rhetorical devices such as 'transitions', 'frame markers', 'evidentials', 'hedges' (Hyland & Tse, 2004) and 'demonstrative reference' (Nunan, 1993). As explained in this chapter, these concepts are helpful in theorising what *is going on* in student writing support, but they also play a role in researcher's empirical work. In the next chapter I will outline the methodological design of my study and explain how theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter 2 have informed my methodological choices and in particular my engagement with data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 3 - Methodological foundations

Much of the research [in the Academic Literacies framing] has been undertaken through an ethnographic lens which provides the opportunity *to make the familiar strange*, to approach everyday practices around student writing as an area of study without bringing to this examination prior judgements about the nature of that writing.  
(Russell, et al., 2009, p. 5, added emphasis)

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines methodological principles that guided my empirical investigation. In line with the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006), my research was designed as an ethnographically oriented qualitative study aiming to explore the emic perspectives of my research participants on issues related to student writing support. As the opening quote indicates, adopting an ethnographic lens offers the researcher a unique possibility of taking a fresh look at situations, opinions and events that may otherwise be too familiar to engage with. In my case, as a professional who worked in similar settings and circumstances to those that have become the object of my investigation, designing my study within a qualitative research paradigm that offers an ethnographic exploratory space for observation, reflection and discovery was a particularly helpful and important methodological move. It allowed me to distance myself from my practitioner's observations and direct my attention towards the emic perspectives of my participants.

My account in this chapter is divided into four parts. I start by presenting my research questions and overall research design (Section 3.2). Next, I relate the process of data collection and describe specific data sets (Section 3.3). Then, I outline how I analysed the data and discuss some of the challenges of that process (Section 3.4). The chapter closes with a brief summary and conclusions (Section 3.5).



### 3.2 Research questions and research design

My study aims to investigate student writing support and focuses on the classroom teaching of academic writing, the perspectives of writing and academic tutors on writing support and requirements, and it explores how students who take writing support classes approach the task of responding to the assessment demands in their academic modules. Based on the theoretical discussions presented in earlier chapters, and with the aim of seeking ways to improve current writing support provision, I have formulated one main research question and four subsidiary questions to guide my enquiry:

Main research question:

*What can be learnt from currently offered institutional writing support and from students' own ways of approaching the task of assignment writing in their academic disciplines?*

Subsidiary research questions:

1. *What writing support is provided to students in writing support classes in order to prepare them for disciplinary requirements of writing in academic modules?*
2. *How do writing tutors on the one hand and academic tutors on the other hand understand writing requirements and writing support?*
3. *How do students understand writing requirements, and what assists them in responding to writing requirements in their academic modules?*
4. *How do students construct answers to essay questions in their academic modules, and to what extent do their answers meet academic tutors' expectations?*

The subsidiary research questions provide a basis for the answer to my main research question, and they allow me to investigate the institutional context of writing support (question 1), perspectives and understandings held by gatekeepers who assist students in learning to write and who assess students' written assignments (question 2), students' understandings and ways of approaching academic writing (question 3), and

finally students' texts written for assessment and tutors' reception of student writing (question 4).

When attempting to devise an empirical 'plan or strategy for conducting the research' (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p.83), I was guided by the understanding that 'no one type of research is closer to 'enlightenment' than any other, but certain kinds of research are better situated to answer certain kinds of research questions' (Malin, 2003, p. 21). All of my research questions are open-ended and exploratory in nature, and therefore lend themselves to qualitative (interpretative) research design (David & Sutton, 2004, pp. 6-12). This type of research is context-specific and 'is done for the purpose of understanding social phenomena' (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 14). Krauss (2005) further explains that 'the goal of a qualitative investigation is to understand the complex world of human experience and behaviour from the point-of-view of those involved in the situation of interest' (p. 764). This description of what counts as qualitative study matches with my research aims as expressed in my research questions: the overall goal of my study is to understand *what is going on* in the writing support in a specific context of UK higher education, and specifically to understand student writing experiences from the point of view of those involved, i.e. student writers, writing and academic tutors. Based on this discussion, I have opted to conduct my study in the qualitative research paradigm (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Silverman, 2005).

The underlying epistemology of qualitative research characterises this type of enquiry as oriented towards a holistic exploration of a given phenomenon in its real-life context. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) explain that 'phenomena in the world are perceived as a somewhat loosely constructed model' (p. 202) which does not necessarily function based on predetermined understandings and a conventional mode of operation. Therefore, a qualitative researcher should maintain an open, exploratory attitude without bringing any prior assumptions or conclusions regarding the phenomenon under study: 'it is the perceptions of those being studied that are important ... [and] 'meaning' is [then reported by the researcher] as perceived or experienced by those being studied' (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, pp. 201-202). These epistemological foundations underpin the conduct of a qualitative enquiry with regards to all the components of research design. As I position my study in the qualitative research

paradigm, I will now briefly outline features shaping qualitative studies in relation to research design, research questions/hypotheses, data collection, data analysis and interpretation:

- *Qualitative design* is to some extent flexible and developmental in nature; however, ‘the subjects or sites to be studied, the length of data collection, and possible variables to be considered’ (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 203) should be decided early on; purposeful (purposive) sampling rather than random sampling is used: the researchers do not conduct a random selection of sites/participants but the sampling is based on the specific features/criteria integral to a given site or given group under study. The research sample is usually small and its size may change as the study develops.
- *Research questions/hypotheses*: qualitative research is inductive and typically starts with foreshadowed research problems, which may take the form of research questions/hypotheses; the questions are open-ended, aimed at the exploration of a given phenomenon, and they are initially loosely specified and become more defined as the data collection and analysis progresses.
- *Data collection* is preceded by seeking access to a research site and by deciding on the researcher’s role (participant-observer or solely observer); the data collection may include direct interaction with the participants (e.g. in an interview) or it may be non-interactive (e.g. when conducting a documentary review); data is gathered by participant/non-participant observations, interviews, oral histories, document reviews and specimen records; the collection results in massive amounts of data which from the beginning needs to be carefully catalogued, preferably in a chronological manner.
- *Data analysis and interpretation* begin with the data collection and usually both processes run in parallel; the initial analysis is helpful in reviewing research questions and adjusting the research design in line with issues that emerged in the research site; the analysis focuses on data reduction (usually by coding), categorising, identifying patterns and developing classifications that allow for a systematic interpretation of the issue(s) under study; the final report focuses on representing the meaning derived from the research site and reflecting emic perspectives of research participants.

The qualitative enquiry, with its epistemological considerations and design features, can be realised in many types of research, e.g. historical, anthropological or ethnographic (for specific examples see LeCompte, Millroy, & Goetz, 2008; Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004). In the study presented in this thesis, I employ qualitative principles sharing an ‘ethnographic gaze’ (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 10) of previous research that draws on an Academic Literacies approach to student writing. In the following sections, I explain characteristic features of an ethnographic study and in particular I explicate what it means to adopt ‘an ethnographic perspective’ (Green & Bloome, 2004), which is a specific orientation that I have taken in my research.

### 3.2.1 Adopting an ethnographic perspective

The term ‘ethnography’ consists of two Greek words *ethnekos* and *graphein* which combined together literally mean ‘writing about other people’ (Erickson, 2002, p. 189). A key characteristic feature of ethnography is that its data comes from extensive field work, i.e. from real world contexts in which a researcher keeps a sustained engagement and who attempts to understand the social world from the participants’ perspectives. This understanding is usually achieved by participant observation, which comprises ‘a mélange of strategies aimed at producing an accurate model of behaviours of particular people (including the related problems of how people justify their behaviours to themselves and how they describe them to others)’ (Harrington, 1982, p. 327-328). The data obtained from fieldwork is analysed not by means of quantification or statistical analysis but by the interpretations of the meanings and functions of human behaviour and usually takes a form of description (Heath & Street, 2008).

Ethnography as an empirical methodology provides a helpful apparatus when researching academic writing and student writing support as it allows for ‘observation of practices surrounding the production of text – rather than focusing solely on written texts – as well as participants’ perspectives on the texts and practices. This ethnographic framing ... [facilitates] exploring and making sense of students’ [and tutors’] perspectives on academic writing’ (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p.11). Depending on research aims an ethnographic study of student writing can be realised in a variety of

ways (see Lillis, 2008 for a detailed account and examples). Recognising ‘the need to focus on the context of writing, for understanding what is involved and at stake in academic writing’ (Lillis, 2008, p. 354), in the study presented in this thesis, rather than attempting ethnography in its traditional sense (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994), I adopt an ethnographic perspective, which implies implementing ‘a more focused approach (i.e. do less than a comprehensive ethnography) to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group’ (Green & Bloome, 2004, p. 4).

In a traditional ethnographic study, ‘the primary obligation is for the ethnographer to be there when the action takes place, and to change that action as little as possible by his/her presence’ (Spindler & Spindler, 1992, p. 64). In my research, such an approach would be hard to achieve and possibly would be ethically problematic. For example, being interested in students’ writing practices, and in particular in what students do when they approach the task of responding to an essay question would entail being present with my students from the moment they are informed about the essay topics and make their choices to the instance when they submit the final version of their papers for evaluation. Such participation is beyond the resources and practical possibilities of my work. Additionally, my student participants might not have been at ease with having a researcher following their activities and documenting every observable aspect of their writing process. Similar issues would have arisen from attempting to conduct first-hand observations of how writing tutors prepare for the writing classes or of how academic tutors evaluate students’ papers. Observing these practices, even though they are a part of my interests in this thesis, would be challenging as writing tutors often prepare classes without pre-planned schedules, using their time between teaching hours. As a result it would be difficult to track their activities. As far as the assessment of student writing is concerned, this is usually a private process which consists of a few stages and is not open to outsiders. For these reasons, I decided that ‘traditional ethnography’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) was not suitable for my research, and I opted to use an ethnographic perspective.

Employing an ethnographic perspective, I adopt in my study the ‘ethnographic principle’ (Hammersley, 2006, p. 9) of exploring my participants’ experience from their own, i.e. from emic/insider points of view (M. Harris, 1976). In order to gain

access to my participants' emic perspectives, I focus on the meaning they attach to their perceptions, opinions and understandings, and I try 'to make sense of what is significant' (Lillis, 2008, p. 367) to my research informants in their emic/insider social worlds. This emphasis on my participants' perspectives helps me to move away from the focus on the text and explore practices around academic writing. This shift is important on the theoretical level, as explained in Chapter 2, and it also has consequences for the methodological choices made in my study (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Exploring the emic perspectives of my participants, I drew on ethnographic interviewing (Heyl, 2001; Spradley, 1979) and specifically used in-depth semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Such interviews are particularly helpful in 'capturing participant perspectives' (Hammersley, 2006, p. 9) and 'describing and understanding the meaning of central themes in the life-worlds of the interviewee' (Kvale, 1983, p. 175). I discuss my use of interviews in Section 3.3.2. In addition to interviewing, my ethnographic perspective extends to include the observations of writing classes and specifically focuses on the investigation of teacher talk (Mehan, 1979) and patterns of tutor interaction with the students, as explained in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.2.1). I view my classroom observations as case studies (Yin, 2013) of writing support offered to students with regard to academic writing and in particular with regard to assisting them in responding to writing conventions in their academic modules. In line with my qualitative and ethnographic design, I do not seek 'typical cases' that would give a basis for generalisations as, for example, describing patterns of particular pedagogic practice. Instead, I draw on the concept of a 'telling case' (J. Mitchell, 1984) which is based on analytical induction and 'enables the analyst to establish theoretically valid connections between events and phenomena which previously were ineluctable' (p. 239). In the context of writing support which tends to be at the intersection of generic provision and specific needs of student writers, the concept of a 'telling case' is particularly helpful in understanding tutors' emic perspectives as well as in 'making previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent' (J. Mitchell, 1984, p. 239).

Drawing on the ethnographic perspective implies conducting a small-scale study, which is often critiqued with regard to the generalizability of ethnographic findings (Patton, 2002). It is frequently argued that because ethnography focuses on researching small samples in a given location, it brings findings that are not

generalizable and therefore are relevant only for local communities. In response to that criticism, Hornberger (personal communication, 26 February 2009) explains that the task of moving *the local* to *the global* is something that does not belong to the ethnographer's agenda:

An ethnographic account if it's really true to the context that it describes, and if it's rich in detail, it's the readers who then draw from that to another context, in other words, the reader who knows another context can make those connections [from the local to the global]. It's the task of the ethnographer to provide as full and complete a description and an interpretation as possible so that the reader can do that [apply the findings to the wider context].

In other words, Hornberger suggests that the generalizability of ethnographic findings lies not in the fact that they represent data collected from large samples, but that their nuanced description of the local invites readers from the global context to reflect and apply the findings to their own circumstances. Inferring from this explanation, ethnography can be described as a 'scientific apparatus that puts communities, rather the human kind, on the map, focusing attention on the complexity of separate social units' (Blommaert, 2006, p. 3) and by doing that invites *the global* to interact with *the local*. In my study, by focusing on a small number of participants in a particular educational setting, I aim to provide a rich ethnographic account of emic perspectives of my participants, which hopefully will shed light on issues of student writing support in the UK higher education. With that in mind, in following subsections I explain details of my research design, namely: my research field, research sample and matters related to research ethics.

### 3.2.2 Research field

When deciding on the specific context in which to conduct my study, I was in search for an institutional site within the UK higher education, which reflects the writing support options currently offered in most of the universities (see Section 1.2.3). I opted for a full time foundation programme for graduate students. In my study I call the programme by a non-specific name: Pre-Masters Programme<sup>9</sup> (PMP). The Pre-Masters Programme which forms my research base was housed in a support unit of a

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<sup>9</sup> Calling the programme *Pre-Masters Programme* is helpful in anonymising the name used in the particular institution where the programme was offered. Using the generic term is also helpful in reflecting how the programme fits into the UK institutional structure.

highly-sought after university geographically located in central London. The Pre-Masters Programme was one year long, with two enrolment options available for students: the first one in September, and the other one in January. The aims of the programme are summarised in Table 3.1:

**Table 3.1 Pre-Masters Programme - Aims**

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The programme is designed to provide a structured pathway into postgraduate programmes related to the fields of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law for international students of high potential.

The full-time three term programme aims to:

- support students in gaining entry to some of the best postgraduate degree programmes in Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, including management related degrees and Law,
- improve students' understanding of and ability to use academic English appropriately and effectively at postgraduate level,
- provide students with a range of study, English and communication skills to help them succeed in their postgraduate study in the UK,
- introduce students to the British educational system and the traditional lecture/seminar/tutorial format,
- provide students with a specially designed course related to the academic field in which they intend to specialise.

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(Handbook, 2009/10, p. 12)

The Pre-Masters Programme can be described as *a mini-university* with its main goal of preparing students for entry to MA programmes. The PMP offered tuition comprising two components<sup>10</sup>: Subject Knowledge Modules – i.e. academic modules that provided students with foundation level knowledge in specific academic subjects, and English Communication Modules – i.e. support modules aimed at assisting students' language and academic literacy development. Subject Knowledge Modules included one compulsory academic module in Socio-Cultural Studies (SCS) and three elective modules in Global Politics (GP), Commerce Administration (CA), and European Law (EW). All PMP students were required to attend the SCS module and one elective module of their choice. As it is the case across the UK higher education, academic writing constituted the main form of assessment on the PMP, and it totalled at 62.5% of a student's final grade (see Appendix 3.1 for assessment breakdown). The students were offered explicit instruction in academic writing in support classes provided as part of the English Communication Modules. The writing classes were compulsory and took place three times a week for a duration of 1.5 hours each. The

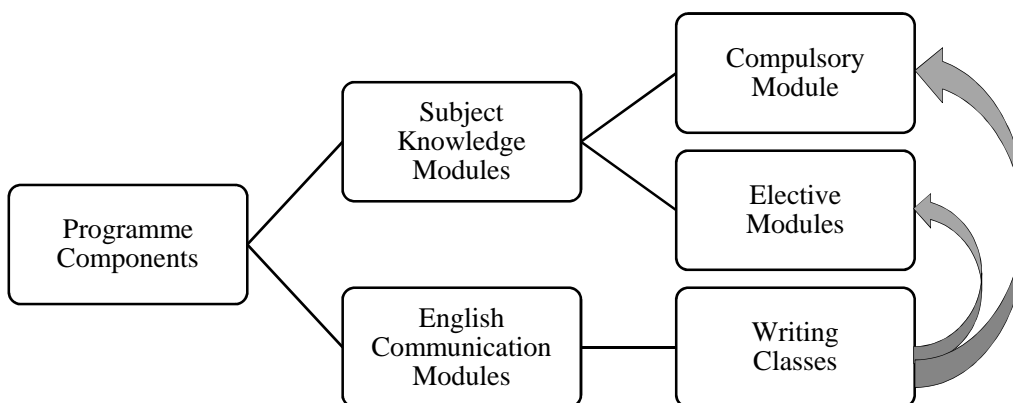
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<sup>10</sup> All module names that I use in this thesis when referring to programme components are anonymised; when anonymising the names I tried to reflect the disciplinary affiliation and teaching/learning aims of a given module.



classes covered a variety of issues starting from referencing, plagiarism, elements of reading, paraphrasing, through rhetorical elements of text structure (with a predominant focus on essay structure), and including elements of academic expression related to grammar and vocabulary (for a detailed syllabus of the writing classes see Appendix 3.2). The pedagogic focus of these classes was on preparing students to write course assignments in their academic modules. Figure 3.1 represents the writing support model on the PMP:

**Figure 3.1 Writing support model on the Pre-Masters Programme**



Such a writing support model, as outlined above, offered me as a researcher a setting in which I could observe *what was going on* in the writing classes and to what extent these classes were helpful in preparing students for written assessment in their academic modules. On the PMP students were allocated to writing classes based on their language level and not on their academic choices. This also reflects how writing provision is offered in the mainstream UK higher education. The classes are not subject specific and they are open to students coming from a variety of courses and disciplines. In the case of the PMP such arrangement meant that in one class there were students representing all elective modules choices. Tutors who taught the writing classes acted also as students' personal tutors<sup>11</sup>, and they read students drafts for essays in Socio-Cultural Studies and gave them feedback on language and on general organisation of text structure, i.e. in line with the teaching focus of the writing classes. Overall, students attending the writing classes were divided into three groups in term

<sup>11</sup> Personal tutorials were very short (15 min), offered to each student only 4 times a term and focused mainly on pastoral matters. Writing support was marginal to the tutorials' aims and content.

1, and in terms 2 and 3 into four groups as the January in-take students joined the course.

As the writing support and general programme set-up on the PMP was recognised by me as well suited for the researching of issues central to my study, I carefully planned my strategy of how to gain access to this particular research site at an institution of my choice. I was aware that securing access to the field is essential for the data collection, and that it is one of the key elements in the ethnographic research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Patton, 1990). I was also aware that ‘the nature of the field determines the nature of the researcher’s entry problems’ (David & Sutton, 2004, p. 107). For that reason I decided to use a less formal, bottom-up approach in seeking access to the Pre-Masters Programme. I contacted a person with whom I was acquainted and who at that time coordinated the programme, in order to arrange for an initial meeting. I prepared a detailed hand-out (see Appendix 3.3) for this meeting to support my case as of why I was interested in researching on the PMP and to help my contact person to understand what my study entailed. This proved to be very useful. During the meeting I found out that the tutors working in that particular site were rather careful when accepting researchers into their classrooms as in their previous experience they felt that they were not fully informed what the nature of a given study was. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain, ‘People in the field will seek to place or locate the ethnographer within the social landscape of their experience’ (p. 63). The prepared hand-out helped me to gain research credibility and trust. If I had contacted the place following an official bottom-down path I could have been refused without a chance to present my project for consideration. The fact that I contacted somebody I was acquainted with, gave me the advantage of overcoming these possible difficulties. My contact person agreed to present my research project to the staff working on that particular Pre-Masters Programme. A few days later I was invited to conduct my research there.

### 3.2.3 Research participants and field relations

In my research I worked with three groups of participants: student-writers, writing tutors and academic tutors. The recruitment process of each of the group was different. Students were briefed about the research in their writing classes and invited to volunteer. Additionally a recruitment email was sent out (see Appendix 3.4 for students' recruitment materials). Writing and academic tutors were approached on my behalf by the programme coordinator. The recruitment of my participants was guided by purposeful sampling. This means that my participants were 'sampled for the information they are likely to yield about a particular phenomenon' (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180). In the case of my study I was looking for participants who would enable me to gain a better understanding of the issues involved in writing support, and in particular with regard to how students approach the task of assignment writing to be able to meet writing requirements in their academic modules.

My group of student informants consisted of 13 participants<sup>12</sup>. All of the students were enrolled for the September start of the PMP and attended the programme in full time mode for the duration of three academic terms. Table 3.2 below gives details of the students' personal background and information regarding their language/literacy competence as well as past and current academic affiliations.

**Table 3.2 Student participants**

Student pseudonym	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Language/Literacy competence	Education	Elective academic module on the PMP
Luana	female	27	South America	Brazilian Portuguese (native) English (advanced) Spanish (advanced) Italian (elementary) French (elementary)	BA in Fashion Design; BA in Architecture	Global Politics
Sophia	female	34	South America	Spanish (native) English (upper-intermediate)	BA in Law; Postgraduate Diploma in Finance	Global Politics
Ronnie	female	30	Central Europe	Hungarian (native) English (advanced) German (intermediate)	BA in International Relations; Postgraduate Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality	Global Politics

<sup>12</sup> A total number of students enrolled for the PMP that year was 61, which means that my student research sample consisted approximately 21% of the student population on the programme.

Natasha	female	37	Eurasia	Georgian (native) Russian (advanced) English (upper-intermediate) German (elementary)	BSc & MSc in Chemistry; Postgraduate Diploma in Public Relations and Leadership; Postgraduate Diploma in Public Policy	Global Politics
Nicole	female	28	East Asia	Chinese (native) English (advanced) French (elementary)	BA in French Language	Global Politics
Chloe	female	24	East Asia	Chinese (native) English (advanced) French (elementary)	BA in English Education	Global Politics
Milena	female	32	South America	Spanish (native) English (upper-intermediate) French (elementary)	BA in Psychology; Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology	Global Politics
David	male	24	East Asia	Chinese (native) English (upper-intermediate)	BSc in Science	Commerce Administration
Ethan	male	27	Far East Asia	Korean (native) English (advanced)	BSc in Engineering; BA in Administration	Commerce Administration
Alice	female	25	Far East Asia	Korean (native) English (upper-intermediate)	BA in English Literature	Commerce Administration
Monica	female	24	East Asia	Chinese (native) English (upper-intermediate)	BA in Applied Psychology; BA in Law	European Law
Rachel	female	25	East Asia	Chinese (native) English (upper-intermediate)	BA in Law; Postgraduate Diploma in Law	European Law
Sarah	female	24	Southeast Asia	Thai (native) English (upper-intermediate)	BA in Law	European Law

As can be seen from the table, the students in my research sample came from three different continents and were either bilingual or multilingual, reporting high level of competence in at least one foreign language. While the bilingual students spoke their respective native languages as well as English, the multilingual students were competent users of three or more languages. The educational backgrounds of my informants offers an insight into that linguistic diversity and in particular into their familiarity with the English language and literacy. My student participants attended international schools and stated that they had learnt English as a part of their curriculum (e.g. Monica, Alice, Ethan, Chloe and Nicole), or that besides the English language classes they had been taught a selection of subjects through the medium of English (e.g. Sophia, Sarah, David, Rachel, Natasha). While pursuing their academic

degrees, my student participants continued to develop their English language competence either by studying modules lectured in English (e.g. Alice, Natasha or David) or by travelling for an extended period of time to English speaking countries, such as UK, USA or Canada, to take English language courses (e.g. Ronnie, Milena and Luana). Moreover, two of my student participants were trained as language teachers, namely Nicole had a BA in French language and Chloe graduated with a BA in English Education. To sum up, the student-writers participating in my study were not novices to English language study, and indeed they had an extensive experience with regard to the learning of foreign language and literacy.

Another aspect that can be helpful and enriching in the understanding of my students' emic perspectives is their life and work experiences. The students in my sample were all well-travelled, which gave them certain understanding, appreciation and acceptance of otherness. They comprised a group of both recent graduates as well as individuals with promising or already established professional careers. As for the graduates, some of them had no history of employment (i.e. Chloe, David, Alice, Monica, Rachel and Sarah), but some went through a short period of apprenticeship (e.g. David and Alice) in international companies. As for those with previous work experience, their professional life was either already successful or en route to rewarding careers. For example, Milena was a respected psychologist, with a thriving private practice. Sophia was a lawyer holding a senior position in her family run company and dealing with some international matters. Natasha worked in the government administration and was highly positioned in political circles of her country.

Taking into account my student-writers' complex backgrounds, outlined above, specifically with regard to their language and literacy, it can be argued the label 'international students' that would typically be assigned to Pre-Masters students may be regarded as over-simplistic and to some degree inadequate (Larcombe & Malkin, 2008). Even though the student-writers in my research sample can be rightly characterised as second language writers, they have a wealth of educational and often professional experience in reading and writing in English. While I acknowledge specific difficulties that students who come from abroad may have with writing in English (for coverage of issues regarding second language writers see, for example:

Hyland, 2003; Kroll, 2003; Matsuda & Silva, 2014; Tang, 2012), I adopt the position that not only so called ‘international students’ but all students need support with writing because of ‘the specialised nature of academic discourse’ (Schmitt, 2005, p. 65). In line with that, in my investigation I have chosen to explore the institutional writing support that is offered to students and their ways of dealing with academic writing requirements. In other words, rather than putting the primary focus of my investigation on issues related to second language writers, in my research I focus on issues related to writing support offered *within* the UK higher education.

Apart from the student-writers, my research sample includes writing and academic tutors. In my study I use the term ‘writing tutor’ to denote instructors teaching support classes on academic writing; the term ‘academic tutor’ is used to denote subject specialists providing lectures and seminars within a specific academic field. In my sample writing tutors comprise a group of 4 instructors. They were all educated to a Masters level with a professional teaching qualification. Two of the tutors were doctoral students pursuing their part-time degrees in academic fields related to Language Education. Three of the tutors had a long standing background in teaching English in academic settings; one tutor recently transitioned from teaching English as a foreign language in a language school to teaching support classes for university students. As for the academic tutors, my research sample comprised a group of 3 instructors. At the time of the data collection, there were 5 academic tutors teaching on the Pre-Masters Programme. Initially all of the tutors agreed to take part in my study, but later having considered the aims of my research 2 of them opted not to participate as they did not see writing as related to their subjects. The three academic tutors, who took part in my study, had previous experience of teaching at university level. One of the tutors was a doctoral student, another one was pursuing an MA degree in his academic area. The third tutor had a successful career in her professional field, and recently began working at university. As for participation in my research, writing tutors took part in my study throughout the period of their teaching on the PMP, and academic tutors were met only once towards the end of the academic year. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 (see p. 94) provide specific details.

**Table 3.3 Writing tutor participants**

Writing tutor pseudonym	Gender	Duration of participation
Sue	female	3 terms
Peter	male	3 terms
Robert	male	3 terms
Tom	male	2 terms

**Table 3.4 Academic tutor participants**

Academic tutor pseudonym	Academic module	Gender	Duration of participation
Stephen	Socio-Cultural Studies	male	1 term
Domenico	European Law	male	1 term
Ellen	Commerce Administration	female	1 term

Taking into account my research sample and ascribing to an ethnographic perspective, it was important for me to consider certain issues related to field relations. In a qualitative paradigm ‘it is recognized that the presence and the influence of the researcher is unavoidable, and indeed a *resource*, which must be capitalized upon’ (Holliday, 2007, p. 137, original emphasis). For that reason, the ways in which researchers position themselves in the field can be of paramount importance to the whole research, in particular to the quality of the data collected and to the process of the data analysis. Silverman (2005) argues that ‘relations in the field cannot simply be a technical issue resolved by technical means’ (p. 254). That is because the social factors could either bring the researcher closer to the participants or distance him/her from them (J. Miller & Glassner, 2004). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain that ‘no set of rules can be devised which will produce good field relations’ (p. 63). With that in mind when conducting my research, I tried to be particularly considerate of my research participants’ needs and expectations they had of a researcher. As mentioned earlier, my tutor participants had previous dubious experience of taking part in an academic study as they were not sure what the aims of the previous study had been and what had been expected from them. Being aware of that, I was particularly careful in making sure that the tutors were well informed about the goals of my research and my expectations regarding their participation. I maintained frequent email contact with the tutors, and I opted to email each of them individually so that I could establish a personal level of communication with every tutor. Moreover, prior to a classroom observation or an interview with a given tutor, I would discuss in advance any particular arrangement relevant to a given instance of data collection. My

field relations were also guided by the understanding that ‘cultivating relationships is always a balancing act, and this balancing act begins with the cultivation of your first contacts and gatekeepers’ (David & Sutton, 2004, p. 107). Throughout the duration of my study I ensured the PMP coordinator was informed and regularly updated on the progress of my data collection. To achieve this, I maintained regular email contact, and I frequently stopped by the coordinator’s office for a brief, informal conversation. Lastly, I also made an effort at impression management. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that ‘personal appearance can be a silent consideration’ (p. 66) helping to establish and maintain relationships with the participants. When I was visiting my research field for the purpose of classroom observation or an interview with a student, I would imitate students’ dress code, i.e. I would dress more fashionably to reflect then current fashion. When I was meeting tutors for interviews, I would dress more casually, again attempting to imitate their dress code. By doing that, I tried to ‘fit in’ with a given group of participants and to put them at ease.

#### **3.2.4 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are pertinent to any type of research that involves human participants or relates (directly or indirectly) to aspects of human life (Roth, 2004; Silverman, 2005). Every researcher is responsible for the protection of their participants, and therefore the importance of research ethics is underscored in relation to ‘various issues of harm, consent, privacy and the confidentiality of data’ (Berg, 1989, p. 39). These issues must be addressed by the researcher when designing the study, but also they must be actively taken account of in the conduct of the study. In other words, a qualitative researcher needs to attend to *procedural ethics* and *ethics in practice* (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

In relation to the study presented in this thesis, the *procedural ethics*, i.e. ‘seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake research involving humans’ (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 263) was satisfied by obtaining approval from the Research Ethics Committee at King’s College London (REC Protocol Number: REP(EM)/08/09-86) and by following the relevant procedures when recruiting the participants and collecting the data. Specific documents related to procedural ethics included: 1) an information sheet for student participants (see Appendix 3.5), writing



tutors (see Appendix 3.6), academic tutors (see Appendix 3.7), and a consent form (see Appendix 3.8). The information sheets were presented to all the participants in the recruitment process; the consent forms were distributed prior to the data collection. Information sheets included details regarding the aims of the research and its possible contributions, the sample selection, data collection procedures, arrangements for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality and finally the informed consent and withdrawal. The information sheets were written in an easy to understand language, without any unnecessary specialised language and free of jargon. The consent form was a short document that emphasised the importance of participants familiarity with the research presented in the information sheet, reinstated the withdrawal rights and stipulated that all data management (in particular secured storage) will be done in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Apart from obtaining consent from students who were interviewed, I also sought the consent of all of the PMP students to be able to collect classroom observation data (including the audio-recording of the classes). For that part of my research, due to practical reasons consent forms were distributed and collected by writing tutors. Two groups returned the forms signed by all students. In the third group two students did not return the form; in these circumstances implied consent (Berg, 1989) was executed in consultation with the writing tutor teaching that group. In the fourth group two students refused to give the consent for sessions to be audio-recorded, but agreed for the session to be audited by the researcher and for notes to be taken (see Table 3.5, p. 101, for details of which sessions were not audio-recorded).

In addition to attending to formal procedures, a researcher should also be sensitive to various ethical dilemmas that may take place in the process of data collection and that are more nuanced than what can be captured by the formal regulations. These dilemmas are referred to as *ethics in practice*, i.e. ‘day-to-day ethical issues that arise in the doing of research’ (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). *Ethics in practice* relies on researcher’s sensibility and knowledge of the research field and research participants. Burton (2000) explains that ‘no one can tell [a researcher] exactly what [he/she] should do in all the circumstances that may confront [him/her] with an ethical dilemma, because it is quite possible that no one else has had to confront exactly that set of conditions before’ (p. 59). In my study one such ethical dilemma was the

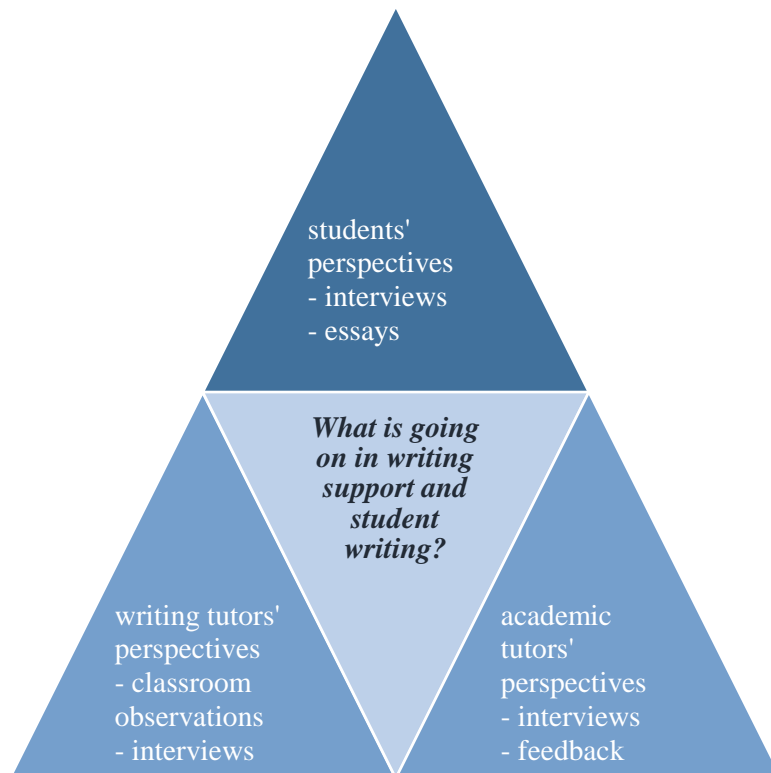
considerable level of anxiety expressed by my participants, both tutors and students, regarding the perspectives and understandings that they shared with me during interviews as well as the distribution of my research findings. This anxiety can be understandable as qualitative research ‘encourages disclosure and authenticity’ (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009, p. 279) which may make some of the participants feel particularly vulnerable. For example, when some tutors articulated their positions and points of view on some topic related to my research aims, they verbally expressed their worry regarding the possible audience that may have future access to the findings of my research. Similarly, some of my student participants were also very careful, often explicitly asking me *to keep to myself* and not to share with the tutors some of the issues they discussed with me. In each of the cases, it was important for me as the researcher to notice these ethically important moments (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) and create the research environment full of ‘empathy for informants [to encourage them to] open up about their feelings’ and concerns (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 48). To reassure my participants, I would normally remind them about the confidentiality of the data collection and about the protection of personal data of each of research participants.

### 3.3 Data collection

Punch (2005) explains that ‘a well asked question indicates what data will be necessary to answer it’ (p.37). In my research questions, I am looking for students’ accounts of how they understand academic writing requirements, what activities they engage in order to meet these requirements, and what they produce as a result. I also enquire about the perspectives of the writing tutors and academic tutors on writing requirements and writing support provided to students. Deliberating how I can find answers to these questions, I was ‘thinking like a shopper’ trying to establish what data will be ‘*useful*’ (Wolcott, 1992, p. 5, original emphasis) to access perspectives, perceptions and meanings of my research participants. In this process I found it helpful to refresh my thinking by 1) reviewing my theoretical perspectives rooted in Academic Literacies and social study of language and literacy, and by 2) a careful analysis of methodological choices made with regard to data collection by researchers working in a framework similar to mine (e.g. Gourlay, 2009; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). As a result of this back and forth intellectual engagement with theory and empirical

work done on student writing, I decided to look for answers to my research questions by conducting observations of writing classes, collecting students' essays and by interviewing students, writing support tutors and academic tutors assessing students' papers (see Figure 3.2 below). These sources of data allowed for a 'sustained engagement in participants' academic writing worlds' and helped to 'build holistic understandings' (Lillis, 2008, p. 362) of issues related to student writing support. Detailed justification of these methodological choices and procedures applied to data collection are discussed in the subsections that follow.

**Figure 3.2 Sources of data**



### 3.3.1 Classroom observations

The first of my research questions addresses writing support offered to students during the writing support classes, which were a part of compulsory provision on the PMP: RQ 1) *What writing support is provided to students in writing support classes in order to prepare them for disciplinary requirements of writing in academic modules?*

This question is examined at the level of classroom interaction. In order to collect classroom data, I observed writing support classes offered to my student participants as a part of the compulsory English Communication Modules. The observations of writing classes were essential in gaining an understanding of what is involved in writing support. So far, studies underpinned by the theoretical perspective of Academic Literacies drew mainly on interview data, which may be seen as a certain limitation. Hammersley (2006) notices that ‘in recent times an increasing amount of work, [described] as ethnographic or qualitative, has relied very heavily, or even *entirely* on interviews’ (p. 9, original emphasis). In my study, I intended to offer a thicker description of issues involved in the writing support and therefore extended my data collection to include the classroom observations. Engaging in classroom observations permitted me as a researcher ‘to be open, discovery oriented, and inductive’ (Patton, 2002, p. 262). In light of recent critique of writing support in the research literature on academic writing in the UK (see Section 1.2.3) as well as my own teaching experience as a writing tutor, I viewed classroom observations as a particularly valuable opportunity for me ‘to move beyond the selective perceptions of others’ as well as to ‘move beyond [my] own preconceptions’ (Patton, 2002, p. 264).

On the Pre-Masters Programme, there were 4 sections of writing classes. Three sections were opened with students who enrolled in September. Once the January enrolment was completed, all sections were reshuffled to form a fourth section. Students were assigned to their writing classes based on their language level. I observed classes taught in all four sections and agreed an observation timetable with each of the writing tutors individually. The tutors would normally suggest which sessions they would be happy for me observe. They considered my research aims and invited me to observe the sessions that they thought would be most useful for me. Prior to each observed session, each tutor would brief me about the teaching content making

sure that I understood how a given session fitted into the overall pedagogic work with the particular group of students.

While observing the lessons, I sat with the students in order to be less conspicuous but also to be in closer proximity to the students' point of view. During each of the observations, I would sit wherever a vacant chair was available on a particular day. As a rule I would not join the class tasks and activities. There were rare occasions, however, when tutors asked me to answer a question or to engage with some individual work and then add to the overall discussion. In term one, I only took notes during my observations, and in terms 2 and 3, apart from taking notes, I also recorded audio data and took white-board snapshots in classes taught by Sue, Tom and Peter. The students in Robert's class did not agree to their classes being audio-recorded (see Section 3.2.4), but they did not oppose to me auditing the sessions and taking notes. During the observations I also collected any available hand-outs that were given to students in a given session. If a tutor did not have a spare copy, I would ask one of the students to photocopy his/her hand-out after the class. Each of the observed sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes. The details of my classroom observations are given in Table 3.5 (see p. 101).

**Table 3.5 Observations of writing classes**

Writing tutor pseudonym	Total	Term / Date of observation	Data collected	Audio-recording
Sue	4 sessions	1 / 2009-12-10	field notes, hand-outs	<i>not recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-03-12	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-05-17	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-05-21	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
Peter	6 sessions	1 / 2009-11-26	field notes, hand-outs	<i>not recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-01-25	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-01-26	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-01-29	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-04-23	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-04-26	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
Robert	5 sessions	1 / 2009-12-03	field notes, hand-outs	<i>not recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-02-12	field notes, hand-outs	<i>not recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-03-09	field notes, hand-outs	<i>not recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-05-10	field notes, hand-outs	<i>not recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-05-14	field notes, hand-outs	<i>not recorded</i>
Tom	6 sessions	2 / 2010-02-01	field notes, audio-recording	<i>recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-02-08	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		2 / 2010-02-09	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-04-27	field notes, audio-recording, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-04-30	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
		3 / 2010-05-11	field notes, audio-recording, whiteboard snapshots, hand-outs	<i>recorded</i>
Total number of sessions observed: 21				
Total number of sessions audio-recorded: 14				

### 3.3.2 Interviews

Two of my research questions enquire about the perspectives of my participants:

RQ2) *How do writing tutors on the one hand and academic tutors on the other hand understand writing requirements and writing support?*

RQ3) *How do students understand writing requirements, and what assists them in responding to writing requirements in their academic?*

I looked for answers to these questions by conducting semi-structured and conversational in nature interviews (Gillham, 2005; Kvale, 1983). Hill and Anderson (1993) advise that a researcher when deciding on a type of interview used in a given study should consider ‘the ‘how’ of interviewing, and the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of the larger research’ (p. 115). I was ‘seeking to obtain descriptions of the interviewees’

lived world' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27) with regard to their emic perspectives and points of view on issues related to student writing support. For that reason the choice of using semi-structured, conversational interviews was suitable as this type of interview 'offers maximum flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate, depending on what emerges from observing a particular setting [in the case of my study from conducting observations of writing classes] or from talking with one or more individuals in that setting' (Patton, 2002, p. 342). This choice of interview type is also in line with the ethnographic and qualitative framing of my study. Patton (2002) explains that 'qualitative inquiry - strategically, philosophically, and therefore, methodologically - aims to minimize the imposition of pre-determined responses when gathering data' (p. 353). In-depth interviews as such offer a unique space to my participants in which they can 'themselves produce accounts of their world' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 124) while 'talking freely with an attentive listener' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 129). With these considerations in mind, rather than expecting from my interviewees definite answers to a fixed inventory of preformulated questions, I prepared for the interviews by developing a relatively flexible list of topics that would allow me to take the conversation with my participations in directions helpful to exploring my research aims. As in my study I interviewed different groups of participants, I prepared different interview schedules (lists of points to be covered) for each of these groups. The details regarding the frequency and content of interviews with each of the groups will be discussed later in this section.

When conducting the research interviews, I followed a similar routine with all of my participants. Prior to each interview, I would book a vacant classroom or a study room in my research site for the purpose of securing a place where my interviewees' privacy would be protected, and where I could audio-record the interview without any disturbances or interruptions. While interviewing, I strived to maintain an informal atmosphere, so often the interviews were conducted over tea, coffee or in a few cases over a light lunch. Each interview started by briefing my interviewee on the purpose of a given interview. At that stage the interview schedule was shown, and I informally outlined the points and associated questions. The interviewee could ask for some clarifications, if needed. The interview would start with the first point but then would unfold in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily

following a prescribed order. While interviewing, I used different types of questions to assist my participants in unpacking the meaning of their statements and in making their emic perspectives more accessible to me (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 135-136). Most commonly, I used follow-up questions (e.g. by repeating or paraphrasing interviewee's noteworthy words/expressions that could prompt further explanations), probing questions (e.g. 'Could you add something more on that topic?'), specifying questions (e.g. 'How did you actually prepare for the first part of ...?'), and interpreting questions (e.g. 'When you say that 'it was a good experience' do you mean ...?'). Whenever appropriate I also used various non-verbal and paralingual ways of encouraging my participants to continue with their accounts. For example: sometimes I nodded or moved my head indicating understanding; at other times I paused and stayed silent for a short while or acknowledged a given statement by uttering 'uhmm, uhmm'. Each interview ended with a debriefing, i.e. I asked whether a given informant wished to add anything more on the points covered in the interview, or whether there was something not covered in the interview but the participant felt that they wanted to add as they saw it relevant to their overall experience.

#### *Interviews with writing tutors*

The interviews with writing tutors were conducted over a period of one academic year (see Table 3.6, p. 104 for details). Due to different teaching arrangements and individual circumstances, the frequency of the interviews with each tutor differed. I conducted three interviews with Sue and Peter, two interviews with Tom (as he joined the PMP in term 2 with the January in-take students), and two interviews with Robert (his other commitments prevented him from being available for one of the interviews). These differences in the number of interview data gathered did not, however, influence the content or points covered in the interviews<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, since Tom joined the PMP in term 2, in his first interview I used interview schedules from terms 1 and 2. In the case of the interviews with Robert, since he was not able to meet me for an interview in term 2, during the interview in term 3 I used interview schedules from terms 2 and 3.



**Table 3.6 Writing tutors' interview data**

Writing tutor pseudonym	Total number / minutes	Term / Date of interview	Mode	Length
Sue	3 / 73`45``	2 / 2010-01-15	in person	30`:25``
		2 / 2010-03-18	in person	29`:46``
		3 / 2010-05-18	in person	13`:34``
Peter	3 / 82`:36``	1 / 2009-12-14	in person	34`:24``
		2 / 2010-02-16	in person	32`:24``
		3 / 2010-07-13	in person	15`:48``
Robert	2 / 66`:58``	1 / 2009-12-17	in person	33`:17``
		3 / 2010-05-11	in person	30`:41``
Tom	2 / 71`:26``	2 / 2010-03-08	in person	56`:02``
		3 / 2010-05-13	in person	15`:24``
Total number of interviews: 10    Total time: 294`:45`` (4 hours 54 minutes 75 seconds)				

In the interviews with tutors I was looking for their perspectives on what is required from students in their writing, and what institutional support is available to students. The interview schedules (see Appendix 3.9) were compiled based on observations of writing classes and on what I was learning about issues related to student writing from my other participants. The key points covered were:

- ~ *interview 1*: tutors' background and experience as writers, written assessment on the PMP, writing requirements, feedback, writing support options;
- ~ *interview 2*: teaching content of the writing classes, cooperation with academic tutors, writing support options, students' cultural and educational background;
- ~ *interview 3*: teaching content of the writing classes, collaborations with academic tutors, writing support options, feedback on student writing.

The interviews were in particular helpful in discussing with the writing tutors specific observations I made while auditing their lessons. As the interviews were conducted cyclically over a period of time, this allowed for a more holistic picture of tutors' perspectives to emerge (Lillis, 2008).

#### Interviews with academic tutors

Each academic tutor in my sample was interviewed once, and these interviews were conducted in term 3 towards the end of data collection period (see Table 3.7, p. 105 for details). As described earlier (see section 3.2.3) not all of the academic tutors working on the PMP participated in my study. Two, out of three who opted in, agreed to meet me in person for an interview. One tutor, Ellen, agreed to participate but insisted that there was not much to share as writing was not an integral part of her module. She was not available for an interview in person but was willing to briefly answer my interview questions in writing.

**Table 3.7 Academic tutors' interview data**

Academic tutor pseudonym	Total number / minutes	Term / Date of interview	Mode	Length
Stephen	1 / 38':20''	3 / 2010-05-10	in person	38':20''
Domenico	1 / 40':03''	3 / 2010-05-21	in person	40':03''
Ellen	1 / 0':00''	3 / 2010-05-24	in writing	two A4 pages
<b>Total number of interviews 3 ( 2 audio-recorded, 1 in writing)</b>				
<b>Total audio-recorded time 78':23'' (1 hour 18 minutes 23 seconds)</b>				

Similarly to my focus in the interviews with writing tutors, while interviewing academic tutors, my main interest was to grasp their emic perspectives on writing requirements and writing support offered to students on the PMP. The interview schedule (see Appendix 3.10) for academic tutors was informed by my overall understanding of the dynamics involved in writing support and issues related to student writing gained during nearly a year long data collection. My interviews with academic tutors covered the following points:

- ~ tutors' background, teaching on the PMP, assessment in their modules, writing requirements, integration/collaborations with writing tutors.

#### Interviews with student-writers

The interviews with students constitute a major part of the data gathered for my study. I interviewed all students three times, with the exception of one student (Rachel) who, due to her personal circumstances, was interviewed twice. The students were interviewed individually, with one exception when two students (Rachel and Monica) due to unforeseen conditions were interviewed together. Table 3.8 (see p. 106) offers the details:

**Table 3.8 Students' interview data**

Student pseudonym	Total number / minutes	Term / Date of interview	Mode	Length
Luana	3 / 128`:05``	1 / 2009-12-17	in person	38`:14``
		2 / 2010-05-14	in person	46`:43``
		3 / 2010-07-07	in person	48`:08``
Sophia	3 / 152`:01``	1 / 2009-12-11	in person	38`:01``
		2 / 2010-04-30	in person	55`:10``
		3 / 2010-06-28	in person	58`:50``
Ronnie	3 / 150`:32``	1 / 2009-12-16	in person	45`:09``
		2 / 2010-04-23	in person	52`:21``
		3 / 2010-07-07	in person	53`:02``
Natasha	3 / 138`:39``	1 / 2009-12-14	in person	53`:51``
		2 / 2010-04-30	in person	43`:09``
		3 / 2010-07-06	in person	41`:39``
Nicole	3 / 127`:11``	1 / 2009-12-15	in person	48`:49``
		2 / 2010-04-26	in person	44`:15``
		3 / 2010-06-17	in person	34`:07``
Chloe	3 / 107`:34``	1 / 2009-12-17	in person	36`:27``
		2 / 2010-04-30	in person	39`:33``
		3 / 2010-06-30	in person	31`:34``
Milena	3 / 165`:54``	1 / 2009-12-14	in person	56`:11``
		2 / 2010-05-14	in person	41`:11``
		3 / 2010-07-02	in person	68`:32``
David	3 / 129`:16``	1 / 2009-12-15	in person	44`:53``
		2 / 2010-03-26	in person	52`:25``
		3 / 2010-06-17	in person	31`:58``
Ethan	3 / 139`:20``	1 / 2009-12-17	in person	39`:05``
		2 / 2010-05-10	on Skype	37`:01``
		3 / 2010-07-06	on Skype	63`:14``
Alice	3 / 116`:43``	1 / 2010-01-21	in person	31`:30``
		2 / 2010-04-26	in person	42`:29``
		3 / 2010-06-17	in person	42`:44``
Monica	2 / 79`:46``	1 / 2009-12-15	in person	36`:44``
		2 / 2010-04-23	in person	43`:02``
Rachel	1 / 54`:47``	2 / 2010-04-23	in person	54`:47``
Monica & Rachel	1 / 48`:20``	3 / 2010-06-17	in person	48`:20``
Sarah	3 / 129`:52``	1 / 2010-01-21	in person	29`:09``
		2 / 2010-03-26	in person	58`:31``
		3 / 2010-07-06	in person	42`:12``
Total number of interviews: 37		Total time: 1668`:00`` (27 hours 48 minutes)		

Interviewing students I was interested in exploring how they understood writing requirements, how they approached the task of assignment writing, and what they found useful in the process of developing their written texts. The interviews covered the following (see also Appendix 3.11 for interview schedules):

- ~ *interview 1*: students' background, writing requirements, responding to writing requirements, feedback, institutional writing support;
- ~ *interview 2*: students' development as a writer, responding to writing requirements, support offered in writing classes, support offered in academic modules;
- ~ *interview 3*: writing requirements, responding to writing requirements, institutional writing support, development as a writer, PMP experience.

As interviews with students were cyclical and spread over the period of one academic year, they allowed for ‘an exploratory space to be developed around [student] academic writing’ (Lillis, 2008, p. 363). In certain sections the interviews drew on the principles of ‘talk-around-text’ technique which specifically facilitates ‘discussion around documents’ (Lea & Stierer, 2011, p. 606). The ‘talk-around-text’ aims at ‘moving beyond the text’ (Lillis, 2008, p. 359) and exploring writing from the writer’s point of view. In the Academic Literacies tradition this technique has been particularly helpful in foregrounding student writers’ emic perspectives on writing conventions and dominant writing practices in the academia (Ivani , 1998; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001). In my study I used that technique to engage with students in conversations on what they do when they approach the task of answering essay questions, in other words what they do prior to the actual writing of the text. It can, therefore, be argued that I extended my ‘researcher’s gaze’ (Lillis, 2008, p. 359) from talking-around-text (or writing conventions) to talking around different activities that students engage in when they approach writing. To emphasise that extended focus, in my study I refer to such interviewing technique as ‘talk-around-assignment-writing’.

Example 1 illustrates how the ‘talk-around-assignment-writing’ was used in my study. The extract is excerpted from the first interview with Sophia, specifically from the section of the interview in which the focus was on discussing her essay in Socio-Cultural Studies written for a topic of ‘*Post War Britain (1945-1979): a decline or growth?*’ Pointing at a hard-copy of Sophia’s essay, I asked her to recount how she engaged with the writing of that essay. My question was very broad. I simply asked ‘So, what did you do?’ She responded the following:

Example 1 - Student interview: ‘talk-around-assignment writing’

- 1 Sophia: *I started working about – I don’t know – two weeks before reading week. So what did*
- 2 *I do? I went to the library first of all, and I have an idea. I have an idea and I start*
- 3 *writing. Here I start looking for bibliography, but sincerely in this I start writing what I*
- 4 *knew, what I knew from my knowledge. ... For example here I said it’s diversity, that’s why*
- 5 *diversity; that’s why this thing ...it can go... it can run in economic things; that’s what I*
- 6 *thought. So for me it was easier. Then, for example, being European, for me I like History*
- 7 *but for me would be, oh, going down, down, down, so I focus just in this. And I start... I*
- 8 *remember I came here a Saturday. There was nobody. I start writing. (lines 279-293/I)*

Sophia, in this extract, describes how she began working on her essay. As my question was rather general and as I did not ask her about any specific features of her essay, this opened a space for Sophia to discuss her work on the essay from any particular activity that she engaged in while working on her text. As evident from her answer, Sophia's engagement with the writing of her SCS essay began early on: *two weeks before the reading week* (line 1), and it consisted of looking for sources, thinking about the topic and writing down her ideas (lines 2-4). Her essay was developed as a result of this intellectual engagement. She also specifically refers to some concepts that she included in her essay, for example *diversity* or *economic things* (lines 4-5).

As the main aim of my study was to explore student writing support, I found using the 'talk-around-assignment-writing' technique as particularly helpful in extending the focus from various textual features to writing practices (Clark & Ivani, 1997) that students precede the actual writing of the text. This move from 'talking-around-text' to discussing the assignment writing helped me to understand what students actually do when they approach the task of writing.

### 3.3.3 Student writing

My final research question enquires about students' written assignments:

RQ4) *How do students construct answers to essay questions in their academic modules, and to what extent do their answers meet academic tutors' expectations?*

I addressed this question by focusing on students' essays written for their academic modules. I initially aimed to collect a smaller number of essays, but in line with the flexibility of qualitative research (see Section 3.2), I collected more texts depending on the number of assignments written by students in their modules. Each student took two academic modules and each term in each module students were required to write an assignment, so this amounted to two essays per term per student. Most commonly students volunteered other documents, especially feedback, so this was collected too. Feedback later proved to be valuable when analysing the essays. Table 3.9 (see p. 109) summarises the details regarding the data obtained from the students. All the essays were useful in 'talk-around-assignment-writing' during interviews, a smaller sample was chosen for closer analysis as will be explained in Chapter 7.

**Table 3.9 Students' essays data**

Student pseudonym	Module	Number of essays collected	Academic terms	Additional documents
<b>Luana</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	2	Term 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for both essays Mind-map for essay in term 2
	Global Politics	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for all essays
<b>Sophia</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments on essays in term 2 and 3
	Global Politics	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	First draft with tutor's comments in the text for essay in term 1 Feedback sheet on essay in term 2 Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essays in term 1 and 3
<b>Ronnie</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essays in term 1 and 3
	Global Politics	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for all essays
<b>Natasha</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essays in term 1 and 2
	Global Politics	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essays in term 1 and 2
<b>Nicole</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essay in term 1
	Global Politics	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essay in term 1 Feedback sheet on essays in term 2 and 3
<b>Chloe</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essay in term 1 Feedback sheet on essay in term 2
	Global Politics	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essay in term 1 and 2
<b>Milena</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
	Global Politics	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
<b>David</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	2	Term 1 and 2	First drafts of essays in term 1 and 2, annotated with writing tutor feedback
	Commerce Administration	2	Term 1 and 2	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essay in term 1
<b>Alice</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	2	Term 1 and 2	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essays in term 1 and 2
	Commerce Administration	0	<i>no submission</i>	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
<b>Ethan</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	0	<i>no submission</i>	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
	Commerce Administration	0	<i>no submission</i>	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
<b>Monica</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
	European Law	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
<b>Rachel</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essays in term 1, 2 and 3
	European Law	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback sheet on essay in term 3
<b>Sarah</b>	Socio-Cultural Studies	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	Feedback with tutor's comments in the text for essays in term 3
	European Law	3	Term 1, 2 and 3	<i>no additional documents submitted</i>
<b>Total number of essays collected: 65</b>				

### 3.4. Data analysis

In a research project when and how the data is analysed depends on the research methodology and the design of a particular study. In ethnographically oriented qualitative studies the data analysis starts early on and informs the choices that a researcher makes while gathering the data. In the case of this study, for example specific interview questions arose from my early engagement with the data and initial analysis. The whole analytical process is ‘recursive and iterative’ (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 147) and aims at a researcher becoming ‘intimately familiar with the data’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.158). In my work I initially catalogued the data and wrote descriptive memos searching for emerging topics and patterns (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As a result of that engagement, I began developing an analytical framework that assisted a more detailed and systematic analysis. As my data can be broadly described as language or discourse data, to avoid the treatment of my informants’ accounts as a mirror ‘reflection of the social world’ (J. Miller & Glassner, 2004, p. 126), in my analysis I used a variety of discourse tools which were described in detail in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.2). In the following sections, I will outline specific procedures that were followed.

#### 3.4.1 Analytical procedures for classroom observations

My analysis of the classroom observation data was focused on tutors’ emic perspectives. For practical reasons (quality of the audio-recorded material) in the analysis I considered instances of tutor-fronted classroom interaction. The analytical process consisted of two stages. In the first stage, drawing on Bloome et al. (2004), I divided each session into phases. This was done based on difference in patterns of communication and interaction between a tutor and students (Bloome, Beierle, Grigorenko, & Goldman, 2009). In the second stage, selected segments of classroom interactions were transcribed and analysed with a focus on *representational meaning* (Fairclough, 2003) which included attention to what a tutor included or excluded in a given representation. To gain a more nuanced understanding of tutors’ intended meaning, I paid attention to speaker commitment as indicated by markers of modalisation and evaluation as well as tutor’s execution of the evaluation move in the turn-taking pattern (Mehan, 1979; Mercer, 1995). Table 3.10 (see p. 111) summaries

linguistic markers of modalisation and evaluation that were considered in the analysis (see also Section 2.4.2.1 for a detailed description of these theoretical notions).

**Table 3.10 Linguistic markers of modalisation and evaluation**

	Linguistic markers	Examples
<b>Modalisation</b>	modal verbs	<i>can, will, may, must, would, should</i>
	modal adverbs	<i>certainly</i>
	adverbs of ‘usuality’	<i>usually, often, always</i>
	other adverbs	<i>in fact, obviously, evidently</i>
	participial adjectives	<i>required</i>
	modal adjectives	<i>possible, probable</i>
	verbs of appearance	<i>seem, appear</i>
	hedges	<i>sort of, kind of</i>
	subjectively marked statements	<i>I think the essay is well-written.</i>
	modality that is not subjectively marked	<i>Expectations are for language to be clear and accurate.</i>
	attributing statements to others	<i>I’m told that you should not teach ‘content’ in writing classes.</i>
	hypothetical and non-hypothetical statements	<i>I will write this essay. I would write this essay.</i>
<b>Evaluation</b>	adjectives	<i>good</i>
	noun phrases	<i>a bad book</i>
	verbs	<i>copied and pasted</i>
	evaluative adverbs	<i>wonderfully</i>
	evaluative statements	<i>This is a clear argument.</i>
	exclamations	<i>What a well-structured essay!</i>
	discourse-relative statements	<i>If you want to be academic in your writing, avoid using ‘I’.</i>
	obligational modalities	<i>The values we believe in should shine through what we do.</i>
	affective evaluations	<i>I like this book on student writing.</i>
	assumed values	<i>This book helps to clarify the debate about academic literacy.</i>

(based on Fairclough, 2003, pp. 164-190)

As for the tutor evaluation move, Table 3.11 summarises possibilities of tutor response that were taken account of in the analysis (see also Section 2.4.2.1 for a detailed description).

**Table 3.11 Tutor evaluation move – possible responses**

	Possible tutor responses
<b>Evaluation move</b>	‘confirmation’ – offers positive evaluation
	‘repetition’ – attracts students’ attention to a significant issue or point
	‘reformulation’ – revises student’s answer and emphasises important points
	‘elaboration’ – expands and/or explicates student’s statement
	‘rejection’ – ignores or cuts off a student’s contribution

(based on Mercer, 1995, pp. 32-33)



In the following sections I provide an example to illustrate how the two stage analytical process was followed and how the analysis was conducted.

Classroom observation data - example of analysis

The example is taken from a writing class with Tom, one of the writing tutors. The class took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2010 and the audio-recording of the session lasted 90 minutes and 10 seconds. The pedagogic focus of the session was to assist students in developing essays for their compulsory module in Socio-Cultural Studies. Teaching materials included a hand-out with SCS essay titles (see Appendix 4.4). In the first stage of the analysis, I repeatedly listened to the recording, read through my notes and paid attention to snapshots taken during the session as well as to the collected hand-outs. Based on that engagement I inductively identified 13 phases in that session (see Appendix 4.2 for a more detailed description):

- 1) Tutor welcome (1.5 min approx.)
- 2) Tutor-led homework check (10 min approx.)
- 3) Tutor setting-up pair work for initial discussion of SCS essay questions (2 min approx.)
- 4) Students working in pairs on the SCS essay titles (6 min approx.)
- 5) Tutor reuniting the class and explaining essay submission requirements (6 min approx.)
- 6) Tutor-lead discussion on how to develop an essay outline (10 min approx.)
- 7) Tutor setting up pair-work focused on developing an essay outline (2 min approx.)
- 8) Students working in pairs on outlining; tutor monitoring their work (30 min approx.)
- 9) Tutor reuniting the class and offering feedback on students' pair-work (10 min approx.)
- 10) Tutor setting up individual work on correction codes (2 min approx.)
- 11) Students working individually on the correction code (4 min approx.)
- 12) Tutor reuniting the class and checking students' work (3 min approx.)
- 13) Tutor summing up the session (4 min approx.)

In the second stage, based on my research aims and questions, I selected segments of classroom interaction for closer analysis. These segments were transcribed (see Appendix 4.1 for the transcription key) and analysed with the focus on representational meaning, as explained earlier. Using the extract below, I will demonstrate my analytical approach. This extract is taken from phase 6, about 26 minutes into the teaching time. The context of this extract is the following: the tutor focuses students' attention on the first essay topic given in the hand-out: *Which of the two paradigms (competitive and dominance) more accurately expresses the nature of journalism in this country?* Then, the tutor (Tom) starts the discussion by asking students about their attitude towards to topic (whether they like it or not), students' familiarity with the issues relevant to this essay question and their position on it. Finally, the tutor says:

Example 2 - Extract of classroom interaction (recording time 26':01''-27':25'')

- 1 **Tom:** Now, I don't really understand what these two paradigms are. I wasn't in the lecture.  
2 Most of you, new students this term, weren't in the lecture. Do you understand competitive  
3 and dominance paradigms?  
4 **S2:** Yea, they are different. I think the competitive paradigm, uhm freedom of the press or  
5 freedom of the speech, and there is a talking conveyance, convenience  
6 **Tom:** Yea  
7 **S2:** Talk about the, you know, the like plu (.) pluralism (unclear) contra (unclear)  
8 **Tom:** I've heard of, yea>>  
9 **S2:** <<Control of the newspaper at least >>  
10 **Tom:** << Ok, I kind of, I kind of understand a little bit better. Thank you. That's great.  
11 But in fact, I could probably make a structure for this question even though I don't actually  
12 understand it.

Reading this extract through the lens of representational meaning (Fairclough, 2003), it can be said that Tom represents the process of developing textual structure as separate from disciplinary knowledge. Even though he seems to encourage students to discuss the content relevant to the essay question (lines 1-3), he in fact does not give students an opportunity to explain the key terms included in the essay title. When one of the students tries to explain what competitive and dominance paradigms mean (lines 4-9), Tom intersects and terminates the student's answer (line 10) stating that he *could probably make a structure* (line 11) for this essay without the understanding of the essay question.

Tom's commitment to the offered representation is revealed through his execution of his evaluation move in line 10. By intersecting the student's response, Tom appears to 'reject' (Mercer, 1995, p. 33) the student's contribution and as such seems to indicate that the subject content is not relevant to the development of the textual structure. Tom's rather strong position is somewhat weakened by his use of two markers of modality: a modal verb *could*, and modal adverb *probably* (line 11). This may indicate that Tom signals that there could be some interrelationship between text and content, but that at the same time Tom's approach to essay writing does not build on such perspective.

As illustrated in the analysis above, paying attention to how meaning is realised in the turn-taking sequence and in speaker's linguistic choices is helpful in the understanding of what is going on. For example, Tom's representation would be different if he did not terminate the student's response but engaged with it, or if he did not hedge his

statement by markers of modality but instead said something like: ‘Essay structure should be developed without paying attention to the subject content’.

### 3.4.2 Analytical procedures for interview data

The interview data was analysed following a two-stage process. In line with the qualitative data analysis (see Section 3.2), the first stage of the process included identifying patterns and developing categories that would allow me to make sense of students’ and tutors’ perspectives. I drew on the principles of thematic analysis which ‘involves the search for and identification of common threads that extend across an entire interview or set of interviews’ (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 400). Having immersed myself in the data by reading the transcripts and listening to recordings, I preceded with inductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). The inductive coding is data-driven and implies that the coding categories are not pre-determined but arise from researcher’s engagement with the data. With that in mind, it is also important to state that my general research aims and questions were helpful in guiding my analytical endeavour.

To ensure validity of my codes and in order to avoid errors in the coding process (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003), I asked two of my colleagues to code two interview transcripts. Later we peer-checked our coding categories by discussing similarities and differences and in this way attempted to establish intercoder reliability (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013). Once the coding process had been accomplished and themes and sub-themes were developed, I did not simply extract sections of the interviews from their original contexts. As a researcher I was aware that analysing ‘strings of words, devoid of context is to risk altering the *meaning* of what was said’ (Burnard, 1991, p. 463, added emphasis). Therefore, to safeguard my further analytical and interpretative work, I would always refer to the context in which a given coded section appeared in the transcript.

In the second stage of my analysis, having in mind that interviews cannot ‘be treated as straightforwardly transparent, a simple reflection of a writer’s [interviewee’s] perspective’ (Lillis, 2008, p. 361), I drew on the notion of *representational meaning* (Fairclough, 2003) in the same ways as with the classroom observation data. As such I paid attention to what aspects of representation were included/excluded and what

was my interviewees' commitment towards offered representations. With regard to the speaker commitment, in the interview data, I paid attention to markers of modality and evaluation (see Section 2.4.2.1). In the next sections I use an interview extract to illustrate how the interviews were analysed.

Interview data - example of analysis

The extract in example 3 comes from an interview with Stephen, a tutor teaching the compulsory module in Socio-Cultural Studies. Based on thematic analysis, the extract was categorised under a theme 'model of writing support' and a sub-theme 'tailoring the support to students' immediate needs'.

Example 3 – Extract from an interview with an academic tutor

- 1 Stephen: *But many of these students improve amazingly over the course. ...from our point of*
- 2 *view their essays do get better, and it's quite common to have people start giving in their*
- 3 *first essay and getting a C+ and then the last essay gets an A. ... I think we'd say yea, that*
- 4 *student has got a lot better and they've probably put in a lot of hard work, they've thought*
- 5 *about what they're doing.* (lines 288-299)

Stephen's representation portrays students as those who are responsible for their progress and development of academic writing ability. His representation emphasises that learning to write takes an extended period of time (line 1) and that it depends on students' effort (line 4). Stephen's commitment to this representation appears strong, which is revealed by his use of evaluative adverb *amazingly* (line 1), comparative adjective *better* (line 2), and an evaluative phrase with heightened intensity *a lot better* (line 4). In lines 3-5 Stephen mitigates his position by using a subjectively marked statement *I think* (line 3) and a modal adverb *probably* (line 4). Analysing Stephen's representation with the attention to how the meaning is realised through markers of modality and evaluation aids understanding of his position (in the case of this particular extract) on student writing support.

### 3.4.3 Analytical procedures for student writing

Similarly to other sets of data, my analysis aimed at understanding emic perspectives of my participants. In the case of students' writing the perspectives of the student-writers and tutors who assess student papers in relation to writing requirements were of my interest. The analysis consisted of two stages. In the first stage I drew on Street's (2009) 'hidden features' framework which was adjusted to my study (see Section 2.4.2.2). In the second stage in line with Academic Literacies tradition I attended to 'the tutor's comments in the margins of the essay, and on the feedback sheet' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 165). As for the 'hidden features' framework, the features that were used in the analysis were developed from the insights obtained from the classroom observation data and from tutors' interviews. The features comprised elements of textual structure and different rhetorical devices helpful in constructing persuasive academic prose. I operationalised these features drawing on Hyland's (1990) model of argumentative essay structure as well as on elements of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005) and textual cohesion (Nunan, 1993). Table 3.12 summarises features under consideration (see also Section 2.4.2.2 for a detailed description of these theoretical notions):

**Table 3.12 PMP 'hidden features' of student writing**

	Specific features
Argumentative essay structure	Thesis stage
	Moves: gambit, information, proposition, evaluation, marker
	Argument stage
	Moves: marker, restatement, claim, support
Rhetorical devices	Conclusion stage
	Moves: marker, consolidation, affirmation, close
	Transitions
	Frame markers
	Evidentials
	Hedges
	Demonstrative reference

In the sections below I will illustrate how student writing was analysed combining the focus on 'hidden features' and tutor's comments.

Student writing - example of analysis

Example 4 has been taken from a student's essay written for an elective module in Global Politics. The title of the essay was: *'In much of the literature, the EU is depicted as an economic giant, but a political dwarf. Do you deem this to be an accurate description of the status of the EU in international politics? Discuss your answer.'* The extract below quotes an introductory paragraph of the essay (see Appendix for 7.1 for the annotation key to student writing data, and Appendix 7.4 for the whole text of the essay):

Example 4 - Student essay - extract

- 1 If we look at a map of the world from the west coast of Ireland to the east of the
- 2 Mediterranean, we can find the 'Eurozone' which consolidates 27 countries and represents
- 3 the European Union. Almost 500 million citizens from different countries share borders and
- 4 are linked with another part of world such as biggest partner in politics and economics. The
- 5 supranational organization as a whole has a bigger influence on the world stage than any
- 6 single countries. *However, sometimes there is a doubt* about the EU power *and* there is an
- 7 idea that the union represents an economic giant but a political dwarf. I do not agree with
- 8 this position, *because* the EU achieved a lot in political and diplomatic world issues. *Also*,
- 9 transformative economic help has a huge influence on developing countries and a decisive
- 10 effect in difficult circumstances [**information move**]. *This essay will examine* how actions
- 11 of the EU bring its political power [**proposition move**]. I *will begin* by explaining the
- 12 principle of organisation, will have a look at the international politics, will analyse the
- 13 military issues in old and recent examples, *and* will consider the crisis situation in Greece
- 14 [**marker move**].

Based on the text analysis, it can be said that the paragraph is carefully structured. It includes three rhetorical moves: 'an information move' providing the background for the discussion (lines 1-10), 'a proposition move' explicitly announcing the aim of the essay (lines 10-11), and 'a marker move' identifying a list of issues covered in the text (lines 11-14). The text also uses various rhetorical devices that enhance the quality of the student's prose, for example: 'transitions' establishing links between the ideas (*however, and, because, also*), 'frame markers' establishing writer's discourse (*this essay will examine*) and signalling how the essay will develop (*will begin*), 'hedges' opening the discussion space (*sometimes there is a doubt*). The tutor commented on this paragraph as offering *good introduction*, and annotated the last sentence stating the following: *your argument is clearly outlined, even though I would have liked more clarity about the steps by which you intend to reach your conclusion (for example: what do you mean by 'the principle of organisation'?).* This comment offers an additional insight into tutor's expectations: it reveals that even though the introduction

gives a clear outline to the essay, it could have provided a more explicit indication of how the writer intends to conduct the argument and eventually arrive at a conclusion. In other words, this comment indicates that explicitness seems to be an important feature in the GP writing.

This example illustrates how attending to ‘hidden features’ and tutor’s comments is helpful in understanding both how the text was constructed by the writer and how it was received by a given tutor evaluating student’s work.

#### **3.4.4 Challenges of data analysis**

As outlined in this chapter my study draws on various sets of data (classroom observations, interviews and student writing) collected over a period of one academic year. This resulted in ‘mountains of raw data’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 162) and in itself posed challenges related to both developing a consistent analytical framework and positioning myself as a researcher towards the analytical process. I will briefly outline these two issues below.

My study is theoretically located in the Academic Literacies perspective which views academic writing through the lens of social practice (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Street, 2004). The emphasis on practice guided me in designing my research as a qualitative ethnographically oriented study (Green & Bloome, 2004) focused on attempting to understand issues related to student writing support through emic perspectives and perceptions of my research participants. Maintaining the focus on emic perspectives was in particular challenging with regard to the analysis of student writing. On the one hand, in line with the Academic Literacies tradition, there was a need to conduct ‘a linguistically-based analysis of [students’] textual material’ (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 160). On the other hand, analysing texts and attempting to understand them from the perspectives of the writers (that is students) and the readers (that is the tutors) brought the necessity to combine analytical tools helpful in understanding textual features with more socially oriented analysis of written material. In my analysis focusing only on textual features would not be in line with theoretical stance and would not give me access to tutors’ perspectives: as illustrated in Section 3.4.3 in the discussion of example 4, a text can be well-structured but that in itself does not assure that it will meet expectations of those who access student writing drawing on epistemological

assumptions of a given academic discipline. Dealing with this challenge, I found the concept of ‘hidden features’ (Street, 2009) particularly helpful as even though it draws on the elements of textual features, it does so taking account of implicit expectations ‘called upon in judgements of academic writing’ (Street, 2009, p. 1). I adjusted Street’s framework based on the insights gained from classroom observation and tutor interview data. Eventually while attempting to understand how students constructed their essays I worked with Hyland’s argumentative essay structure and a set of rhetorical devices that help to develop convincing academic prose. Moreover, staying in the focus on social practice, I then read students’ essay attending to tutors’ annotations and comments. This combined focus on the text and elements of social practice was helpful in gaining understanding of emic perspectives of both students and tutors.

As indicated in various places in this thesis, my study has originated from my professional curiosity and experience. As much as this has been helpful in deciding on the theoretical framing and the design of my study, my own teaching experience was one of the challenges of during the analytical process. Gobo (2008) argues that conducting ethnographic research in settings in which a researcher belongs or is very familiar with can be a source of difficulty as that familiarity may prevent the researcher from seeing issues, connections and hidden assumptions relevant to a particular phenomenon under study. In my study attempting to *make strange* what appeared *so familiar* (Russell, et al., 2009) and taking account of Leung and Hawking’s (2011) assertion that ‘in ethnographic research no analysis can be neutral or objective’ (p. 350), I made a sustained effort to develop analytical framework consistent with my theoretical stance and aims of my study. I drew on a variety of analytical concepts and notions, which I described in detail in this chapter and in Chapter 2. Additionally, seeking to gain distance from my own reading of my research data I discussed my initial analysis and findings with my colleagues and others who are less associated with the field of Education in particular and with the academia in general. I also gave more formal presentations of my research during various international conferences and workshops discussing my work with the wider academic community (see Appendix 1.1 for a list of presentations associated with this thesis).



### **3.5 Conclusions**

In this chapter I presented my research design and methodological foundations that allow me for an exploration of student writing support with regard to writing classroom, emic perspectives of my research participants and samples of student writing. In my account I outlined issues related to accessing my research field, recruitment of research participants and maintaining field relations. I also focused on research ethics and offered a detailed account of procedures taken in data collection and analysis. The following four chapters constitute my data chapters in which I offer analytical accounts and report on my research findings. Chapter 4 focuses on classroom observation data. Chapter 5 presents interview data with academic and writing tutors. Chapter 6 offers analytical accounts based on student interview data. Finally, Chapter 7 deals with student writing data.

## Chapter 4 - Writing classes: supporting assignment writing

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of four data analysis chapters presented in this thesis. The chapter is concerned with exploring issues of writing support that is available to students enrolled on the Pre-Masters Programme. The discussion presented here draws on observations of writing support classes offered to students as a part of a compulsory provision within the English Communication Modules. Specifically, I analyse three ‘telling cases’ (J. Mitchell, 1984) of writing support: Tom’s sessions on how to write an essay in an academic module of Socio-Cultural Studies, Sue’s session on exam writing and Peter’s sessions on writing an academic critique. The findings reported from the analysis of these sessions provide a response to the first research question: *What writing support is provided to students in writing support classes in order to prepare them for disciplinary requirements of writing in academic modules?*

When examining writing support classes, I take the Academic Literacies perspective (Lea & Street, 1998) as my theoretical lenses that aid my understanding of *what is going on* in the writing classroom (see Chapter 2). My research focus is on exploring how writing tutors guide students in responding to writing requirements in academic modules. In particular, I investigate to what extent writing support is helpful in assisting students in addressing the assessment requirements. In terms of analysis (see Section 3.4.1 for specific details regarding the analytical procedures for classroom observations), I investigate each session presented in this chapter at the level of interactional units (Bloome, et al., 2004). Based on differences in patterns of interaction and communication between tutors and students (Bloome, et al., 2009), I divided each session into phases. Then, as I was interested in tutors’ *emic* perceptions, I focused on the phases that presented tutor-fronted interactions with the whole class. In order to access how writing tutors view academic writing and writing support, I analysed tutors’ utterances through the lenses of *representational meaning* (Fairclough, 2003; see Section 2.4.2.1 for a broader account of all discourse concepts used for analysis in this chapter), and as such I paid attention to what was included/excluded and what was given greater/lesser prominence in tutors’ accounts. To enrich my analysis and gain better understanding of positions taken by tutors with

regard to emerging representations, I paid attention to instances when tutors' statements were marked by modalisation and evaluation (Fairclough, 2003). With regard to markers of modality and evaluation, I analysed the extent to which tutors 'commit themselves to' the propositions they make (Fairclough, 2003, p. 164, original emphasis). Additionally, I also considered the role and execution of tutors' evaluation moves in triadic dialogues with students (Mehan, 1979; Mercer, 1995). When considering tutors' evaluation moves I paid attention to how tutors control the meaning by enabling or 'putting constraints on the contributions' of students (Fairclough, 2001, p. 113).

This chapter starts with presenting the rationale behind choosing particular sessions as 'telling cases' (Section 4.2). Then, it proceeds to discussing examples of classroom teaching by presenting data from classes with Tom on essay writing (Section 4.2.1), with Sue on exam writing (Section 4.2.2) and with Peter on critique writing (Section 4.2.3). The chapter closes with a concluding section (4.3), which presents a summary of findings and offers closing remarks.

## **4.2 Telling cases of classroom support**

The examples of classroom support that form the basis for discussion in this chapter were chosen from a total of 21 writing sessions that I observed during the data collection period (see Chapter 3). In my initial analysis of all of the observed sessions, I read through the observation notes, listened to the recordings of the data and tried to address the question *what was going on* during classroom interaction: what students were expected to do, what instructions they were given, what the tutors emphasised in their teaching, whether they brought in disciplinary requirements explicitly into the discussion, or remained with an attempted 'generic' overview of writing skills, and what materials were used in classroom teaching. As my understanding of the data grew, I wrote descriptive memos aiming at establishing the pedagogic focus of each session. Table 4.1 (p. 123) offers a summary of that work:

**Table 4.1 Writing classes - number of observations and teaching focus**

Writing tutor pseudonym	Number of observations	Term / Date of observation	Pedagogic focus
Sue	4 sessions	1 / 2009-12-10	Use of articles; text cohesion (it/this)
		2 / 2010-03-12	Use of prepositions
		3 / 2010-05-17	Timed writing for SCS: mock exam
		3 / 2010-05-21	Feedback on SCS mock exam – sentence work
Peter	6 sessions	1 / 2009-11-26	Essay writing: Linking words, reporting verbs, plagiarism
		2 / 2010-01-25	Academic Critique – analysing example critiques
		2 / 2010-01-26	Academic Critique – developing an outline, critical reading
		2 / 2010-01-29	Academic Critique – focus on introductions
		3 / 2010-04-23	Reading: analysing academic articles
		3 / 2010-04-26	Reading: analysing academic articles
Robert	5 sessions	1 / 2009-12-03	Paragraph practice: topic sentence, supporting evidence
		2 / 2010-02-12	Essay structure: analysing examples
		2 / 2010-03-09	Essay writing: cohesion
		3 / 2010-05-10	Grammar and style
		3 / 2010-05-14	Reading: identifying bias – examples from a newspaper
Tom	6 sessions	2 / 2010-02-01	Turnitin workshop
		2 / 2010-02-08	Grammar: linking words
		2 / 2010-02-09	Essay writing: SCS essay questions, writing an essay outline
		3 / 2010-04-27	SCS essay feedback clarification, analysing academic article
		3 / 2010-04-30	Essay writing: SCS essays
		3 / 2010-05-11	Essay writing: SCS essays

From this initial engagement with the classroom observations, a pattern started to emerge that some of the sessions focused on selected features of language use, such as articles or prepositions or offered practice on how to structure an introduction or write a thesis statement with no reference to students' assignments in their academic modules. In other sessions, however, tutors attempted to frame the writing support within the context of writing requirements in subject modules. I found concepts of a *typical* versus a *telling case* (J. Mitchell, 1984) useful at that point in my analytical work. A typical case involves a more statistical methodology, that of inferring relationships observed in a sample of instances available to the analyst and then relating these to the wider population; a telling case is more theoretical than statistical, defined by Mitchell (1984) as a 'case in which the particular circumstance surrounding a case, serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationship suddenly apparent' (p. 239). Employing this typical-telling distinction, I drew on a more ethnographic perspective for describing instances of writing support and concentrated on sessions in which writing tutors placed pedagogic focus on writing assessments in subject modules and as such seemed to extend beyond a model of supposedly 'context-free' writing support. Exploring these sessions allowed for observation of the extent to which writing support classes can offer a meaningful context for assisting students in responding to writing requirements in academic disciplines. In other words, these

classes stood out as having the potential to illuminate the relationship between generic writing support and disciplinary requirements, and therefore were identified as *telling* examples of this kind of writing support – as opposed to the kind of writing support that is more ‘generic’ and less sensitive to disciplines. This analytical process resulted in my categorising three telling cases, each having a different assessment focus and taught by a different tutor. The telling cases are listed in Table 4.2:

**Table 4.2 Telling cases of writing support**

Telling case	Writing tutor's pseudonym	Number of sessions considered	Session number / date / term	Assessment focus
Telling case 1	Tom	2	1 / 2010-02-09 / winter 2 / 2010-04-30 / spring	Essay for SCS academic module
Telling case 2	Sue	1	1 / 2010-05-21 / spring	Exam essay for SCS academic module
Telling case 3	Peter	3	1 / 2010-01-25 / winter 2 / 2010-01-26 / winter 3 / 2010-01-29 / winter	Academic critique of a discipline-specific article for writing classes

In the following sections, I present the three telling cases. For each of the telling cases I outline the teaching context, and for each of the constituent sessions I offer a summary of phase division analysis (Bloome, et al., 2009). Then, I analyse selected extracts<sup>14</sup> from whole class tutor-fronted interactions that have been ‘identified as appropriate for illustrating conceptual issues’ (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2013, p. 402) discussed in this thesis.

#### 4.2.1 Tom’s sessions on essay writing

The examples of Tom’s classroom teaching include two 1.5 hrs sessions focused on helping students to respond to essay questions in their compulsory subject module of Socio-Cultural Studies. Both sessions were well-attended, with 12 students being present in the first session and 10 in the second. Teaching materials for these sessions consisted of essay titles for Socio-Cultural Studies. In session 1, Tom brought these titles on the hand-out (see Appendix 4.4); in session 2 the tutor worked with the topics suggested by the students or himself.

<sup>14</sup> Transcription key for classroom observation data is included in Appendix 4.1.

The first session took place in the first part of the winter term (date: 2010-02-09). This session comprised the following phases (for a more detailed description of each phase see Appendix 4.2):

- 1) Tutor welcoming the students (1.5 min approx.)
- 2) Tutor-led homework check of an exercise on linking words (10 min approx.)
- 3) Tutor setting-up pair work aimed at students' familiarising themselves with SCS essay questions for this term (see Appendix 4.4 for SCS essay questions) (2 min approx.)
- 4) Students working in pairs and checking their understanding of the SCS essay titles (6 min approx.)
- 5) Tutor reuniting the class and explaining to the students the submission requirements for the SCS essay (6 min approx.)
- 6) Tutor leading a discussion on how to develop an essay outline from an essay title (10 min approx.)
- 7) Tutor setting up pair-work and instructing the students to work on a chosen essay title in order to develop an outline (2 min approx.)
- 8) Students working in pairs on their essay outlines with tutor walking around the classroom and offering assistance if needed (30 min approx.)
- 9) Tutor reuniting the class and offering feedback on students' attempts to write an essay outline (10 min approx.)
- 10) Tutor setting up individual work on correction codes (2 min approx.)
- 11) Students working individually on the correction code exercise (4 min approx.)
- 12) Tutor reuniting the class and checking students' individual work (3 min approx.)
- 13) Tutor summing up the session and assigning homework (4 min approx.)

The second session took place in the first part of the spring term (date: 2010-04-30). This session comprised of the following phases (for a more detailed description of each phase see Appendix 4.3):

- 1) Tutor welcoming the students (4 min approx.)
- 2) Tutor returning summary assignments to students (3 min approx.)
- 3) Tutor responding to individual students' questions on issues with writing SCS essays (41 min approx.)
- 4) Tutor-led discussion on how to develop a SCS essay from an essay title (20 min approx.)
- 5) Tutor setting up pair-work asking students to develop essay outlines from essay titles (12 min approx.)
- 6) Tutor setting up homework asking students to write an exam essay under timed conditions (6 min approx.)
- 7) Tutor summing up the session (2 min approx.)

In the two sessions discussed here, Tom represents the process of essay writing as an interplay between subject content and surface features of an essay structure. In his pedagogic approach, Tom reveals contrasting representations of the interplay: on the one hand, he portrays subject content as an important part of providing an answer to a given essay question; on the other hand, he appears to represent essay structure as separate from student understanding and engagement with subject content. In the sections that follow, I will illustrate these pedagogic tensions.

Developing an essay (1): subject content and text structure

When working with students on developing an essay for the Socio-Cultural Studies module, Tom would make almost continuous references to both subject content and textual features of an essay. This is illustrated in extract 1 taken from session 1 (phase 6). At this stage Tom distributed a hand-out with essay titles (see Appendix 4.4), explained the particularities of essay submission, and then took the discussion directly and explicitly to the essay titles. Tom began with essay question number 1: *Which of the two paradigms (competitive and dominance) more accurately expresses the nature of journalism in this country?*

**Extract 1** (recording time: 25`00``-27`25``)

- 1 **Tom:** So, back to the questions. Who likes number 1?
- 2 **S1:** Not me
- 3 **Tom:** Not me, right? OK, it's a humble question. '*Which of the two paradigms (competitive*
- 4 *and dominance) more accurately expresses the nature of journalism in this country?*'
- 5 **Tom:** Were you in this lecture?
- 6 **S2:** Last term
- 7 **Tom:** Last term?
- 8 **SS:** Yea
- 9 **Tom:** What's the answer?
- 10 **S2:** Answer? There is no correct answer.
- 11 **Tom:** Eeeeh. No correct answer? I think you should apply that to most of these questions.
- 12 There is no correct answer. Which is why you need to show your position.
- 13 Now, I don't really understand what these two paradigms are. I wasn't in the lecture. Most
- 14 of you, new students this term, weren't in the lecture. Do you understand competitive and
- 15 dominance paradigms?
- 16 **S2:** Yea, they are different. I think the competitive paradigm, uhm freedom of the press or
- 17 freedom of the speech, and there is a talking conve (.) nience, convenience
- 18 **Tom:** Yea
- 19 **S2:** Talk about the, you know, the like plu (.) pluralism (unclear) contra (unclear)
- 20 **Tom:** I've heard of, yea>>
- 21 **S2:** <<Control of the newspaper at least >>
- 22 **Tom:** << OK, I kind of, I kind of understand a little bit better. Thank you. That's great.
- 23 But in fact, I could probably make a structure for this question even though I don't actually
- 24 understand it. [Tom turns to the whiteboard and for about 42 seconds he writes an outline
- 25 (see Figure 4.1 p. 129) for the essay in question. There is no communication with the students;
- 26 the classroom is in silence.]

In this extract, Tom's guidance on how to answer an essay question seems to include two somewhat contrasting representations. The first representation appears to emphasise the importance of subject content and highlights that students need to take a position on issues raised in a given essay title (lines 1-12). Tom leads students to that understanding by first signalling that in order to be able to produce an acceptable response, they need to consider a given question as interesting and enjoyable. Tom talks about *liking the question* (line 1). Then, Tom signals that it is also important that students have a good level of familiarity with the subject content. Tom asks twice whether students attended the lecture (lines 5 and 7). Finally, Tom asks the students about their perspective on the issues included in the essay title: *What's the answer?* (line 9). Building on student subsequent response: *Answer? There is no correct answer* (line 10), Tom explains that essay questions do not have right or wrong answers, but what is essential is that students present their own position and are able to justify it. Tom says: *No correct answer? I think you should apply that to most of these questions. There is no correct answer. Which is why you need to show your position* (lines 11-12). In this representation of essay writing, the subject content is given paramount importance and students are encouraged to engage in the meaning making process and develop their positions on the issues evoked in the essay questions.

The second representation appears to present essay writing more in terms of textual organisation than engagement with a given subject content. In particular, this representation seems to indicate that developing an essay structure is not entirely a matter of knowing the subject content and taking a position but rather involves familiarity with general textual features of an essay. In the second part of this extract (lines 13-26) Tom first seems to prompt the students to engage in a discussion on the essay question (lines 13 -15), but when one of the students attempts to offer an elaborate explanation (lines 16-21), Tom quite simply cuts the student off by interrupting him in the middle of the sentence by saying: *OK, I kind of, kind of understand a bit better. Thank you. That's great. But in fact, I could probably make a structure for this question even though I don't actually understand it* (lines 22-24). In other words, Tom explicitly 'puts constraints' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 113) on the student's answer, which at the same time undermines the importance of subject content in developing an essay structure, and indicates that *making a structure* (line 23) for a given essay is possible without the *understanding* (line 24) of disciplinary content



knowledge. This representation portrays essay writing on the level of generic skills and separates it from the meaning making process.

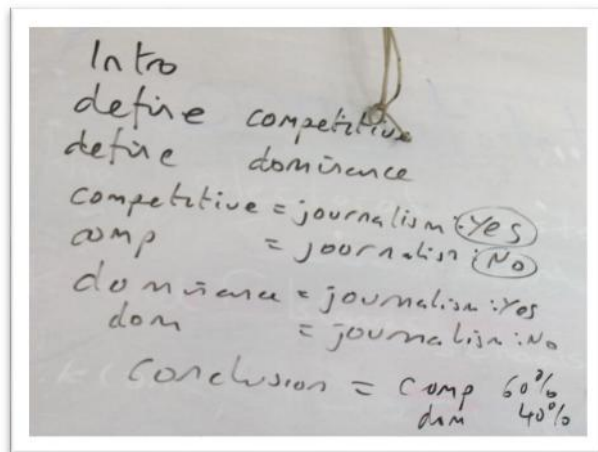
The two outlined representations are offered by Tom with a varied degree of commitment. The representation of essay writing on the level of meaning making and taking a position appears to be portrayed with a relatively strong commitment on the part of the tutor. When leading the students towards the importance of subject content and taking a position, Tom in his evaluation moves (lines 3-4, 11-12) reformulates the students' responses, incorporates them to the classroom discourse sustaining the focus on subject content and showing his strong commitment to this proposition. The focus on subject content is additionally strengthened by Tom withholding his evaluation move in line 7 and repeating his question (in an ellipted form: *last term?*) whether students attended the lecture on journalism. This break in the triadic dialogue often builds suspense (McCarthy, 1991) and thus can have function of attracting students' attention to what follows highlighting the importance of the point made, in this case the importance of familiarity with subject content and taking a stance. Additionally, Tom supports his strong position by using modal verbs such as *should* (line 11) and *need to* (line 12) when explaining the importance of taking a stance when answering an essay question.

The representation of essay writing as separate from subject content also seems to be initially portrayed with much commitment on Tom's part. When suggesting that developing a structure does not have to be underpinned by students' familiarity with the subject content, Tom makes his commitment to this representation known by terminating a student's response midway through his utterance (line 22). Such execution of Tom's evaluation move strongly signals that in his view subject content familiarity is not the only pre-requisite for developing an essay structure. It has to be noted, however, that Tom seems to mitigate the strength of this particular representation. When saying *I could probably make a structure for this question even though I don't actually understand it* (lines 23-24), Tom weakens his stance by using two markers of modality, i.e. a modal verb *could* and an adverb *probably*. It seems that his signalling the lesser commitment may be linked to the fact that he is not a subject specialist and does not have expert knowledge of the issues that otherwise might be important in shaping the text structure. Tom says that he does *not understand*

what the essay question is about (lines 23-24), and therefore as a writing tutor, he chooses to represent the development of text structure as a process that *could probably* (line 23) be separate from disciplinary knowledge. So, the generic academic writing support position is in fact presented with modified modality, which could be a way of signalling a limitation of that support.

Based on the presented analysis, it can be inferred that in extract 1 Tom seems to endorse the importance of subject content in the essay writing (as in lines 1-12), but due to his unfamiliarity with content relevant to the given essay question, Tom chooses not to engage with the subject content and suggests that it is possible to separate the process of essay writing from the actual understanding of disciplinary knowledge (as in lines 13-24). In extract 1, however, Tom only makes a bold statement regarding this possibility and does not offer any insight into what he means by claiming that an essay structure can be developed without the understanding of subject content relevant to a given essay topic. Instead, Tom turns to the whiteboard and writes an outline (see Figure 4.1) for the essay in question without inviting any contributions from the students.

**Figure 4.1 Whiteboard snapshot: Essay structure**



The outline in Figure 4.1 offers Tom's suggestion on how to *make a structure without the understanding* of subject area relevant to a given essay question. Extract 2, which in the classroom interaction follows immediately extract 1, presents Tom's explanation of his suggested structure:

**Extract 2** (recording time: 27':26``-29':17``)

- 1 **Tom:** You get the idea? (.8``)  
2 **SS:** *[Students nod their heads, mostly indicating their understanding. Tutor continues to write*  
3 *on the board and does not look at the students.]*  
4 **Tom:** Three, four, six, eight paragraphs for us. Yes, good idea. *[Tom talks to himself.]* (.)  
5 So, if I was gonna approach that. I don't understand what it means but I'll do some research.  
6 I will find the reading list and work out what all these terms mean but in your essay you  
7 probably need to give a definition of what this competitive paradigm means. Right?  
8 **S4:** Yes  
9 **Tom:** I guess you have your introduction. What's you gonna do in your essay. First stage  
10 what is competitive paradigm. Paragraph one two three. What is the dominance paradigm.  
11 Now the reader knows what it is. Now, the question is which one of these two paradigms  
12 expresses the nature of journalism. So, perhaps the competitive paradigm isn't about  
13 journalism and there must be some reasons why that's correct; however, competitive  
14 paradigm maybe does not equal journalism exactly or maybe it's not the best way to do it,  
15 OK? Same for the dominance paradigm. The conclusion, which one is the better one? Right?  
16 Obviously there is no right answer but you still could choose from your analysis to show that  
17 your answer is the competitive paradigm (.) maybe (.) 60%, and the dominance paradigm  
18 maybe 40%. Obviously do not write the percentage numbers in your conclusions. Yes?  
19 **S4:** Yes  
20 **Tom:** Cool! Uhm, (.4``) so what I would like you to do now (.) Is that kind of. (.) OK? You  
21 get an idea what structuring is?  
22 **S4:** *[Student turns her head horizontally to the left and to the right meaning 'no'.]*  
23 **Tom:** How dare you? *[Tom speaks in a cheerful tone of his voice.]*  
24 **S4:** *[Students laugh]* just joking, joking  
25 **Tom:** Of course you can!

In this extract, Tom starts with representing essay structure as some sort of template that consists of paragraphs with different functions depending on their position in the overall structure. This representation highlights surface text features such as what goes into an introduction (line 9), definition (lines 9-10), body paragraphs (lines 11-15) and conclusions (lines 15-18). Such a formulation of an essay structure is not untypical of generic writing courses and is presented as sufficient for handling structuring issues.

Tom brings subject content into his representation as an element of carefully offered advice on how to become familiar with content relevant to a given question and where to use elements of that content knowledge in the structure of an essay. Tom advises the students that when approaching the essay question they should research the topic (line 5), try to understand the meaning of key terms (lines 6-7), define these terms in the introductory section of the essay (lines 9-10), engage with the essay question through the analysis (lines 11- 15), and finally draw conclusions based on the analysis (lines 15-18). It can be said that such representation of subject content is at the level of general advice on techniques that guide students in how to deal with subject content

and that do not encourage engagement with disciplinary knowledge and meaning making.

The final element of Tom's representation seems to blur the division between text structure and subject content and attempts to combine surface text features and the subject content. When discussing the middle part of the essay structure, Tom stimulates a hypothetical analysis: *So, perhaps the competitive paradigm isn't about journalism and there must be some reasons why that's correct; however, competitive paradigm maybe does not equal journalism exactly or maybe it's not the best way to do it, OK? Same for the dominance paradigm* (lines 12-15). This shift from surface text features and advice on approaching subject content to a hypothetical engagement with disciplinary knowledge, on the other hand, is also illustrated in the outline written by Tom on the whiteboard (see Figure 4.1, p. 129). The middle sections of the outline are not made up of generic labels such as 'body paragraph 1', but instead Tom uses key terms from the essay question such as 'competence', 'dominance' and 'journalism'. This appears to signal engagement with ideas represented by those key terms as located in the disciplines and suggests that focusing only on surface level features is limiting in that it denies students the opportunity to engage in the writing process at the level of meaning making.

As suggested by the presented analysis, in extract 2 Tom offers a complex representation of the interplay between subject content and the process of developing an essay structure. Tom operates on at least three levels: 1) surface text features, 2) general advice on working with subject content, and 3) hypothetical engagement with disciplinary knowledge. It can be said that the engagement with disciplinary knowledge seems to emerge as an integral element of Tom's explanation of how to *make a structure*. Tom's commitment to this multileveled representation is rather strong from the beginning to the end of this extract. In line 4, extract 2, he says: *Yes, good idea* – with adjective *good* being a marker of evaluation and signalling the desirability of such representation. At the end of that extract it becomes apparent that Tom may not be sure whether students understood his complex explanations. In his initiation move in line 20 he seems to start giving instructions for students to do some follow-up practice. He says: *so what I would like you to do now*, but he stops midway through his statement and checks with students whether they *get an idea what*

*structuring is* (line 21). When the students offer only a nonverbal and noncommittal response, Tom chooses not to explore further what students may have problems with but instead he challenges them with an attitude of jocularly and says *How dare you?* (line 23). Then, he in a way answers his own question and imposes the understanding of his representation on the students. He simply says: *Of course you can!* (line 25). This execution of Tom's evaluation move seems to indicate that even though students may not fully understand the structure developed by Tom and his explanation of it, they should make an effort to accept it and follow it in their own work on essay writing.

It thus can be stated that extract 1 and extract 2 paint a complex picture: Tom first stresses the importance of taking a position on issues included in essay question, and as such he emphasises the importance of subject content in essay writing (extract 1); then he states that essay structure can be developed without the understanding of subject content (extract 1); finally, as he offers an example of such structure, he engages in a hypothetical analysis of the subject content which determines how the structure develops (extract 2). A student can only wonder what is happening. Looking at this through the lenses of *representational meaning* (Fairclough, 2003), it can be said that in these two extracts the interplay between the essay structure and subject content is indeed given much prominence, but there is also another overarching representation that underpins the whole classroom interaction: Tom does not know the subject content. He frequently admits that: *I don't really understand what these two paradigms are* (extract 1, line 13), *I don't actually understand it* (extract 1, lines 23-24), *I don't understand what it means* (extract 2, line 5). It can be argued that it is this lack of expertise in discipline specific knowledge relevant to a given essay question that makes Tom's detailed explanations unclear and simply difficult to follow. It can be argued that it is also that lack of expertise that makes him downplay or balance the importance of meaning-making with the attention to surface level of engagement with the process of essay writing. I will discuss this further in the following section.

Developing an essay (2): emphasising textual structure

Extract 3 taken from session 2 (phase 3) illustrates Tom's downplaying attitude towards the subject content in the process of essay writing. That extract comes from the end of discussion with one of the students regarding her attempts to address the following SCS essay question: *How valid are Enlightenment ideas for non-Western world?* This is the advice the student received from Tom:

**Extract 3** (recording time 22':22''-23':35'')

- 1 **Tom:** I think it's a question, and there's no right answer for this, right. And to most of those  
2 questions, there is no right answer for this. So, to a certain extent, uhm, you gonna be judged  
3 on just, you know, using appropriate ideas, organising it well, nice paragraphing etc. etc. So  
4 to a certain extent I might not worry perhaps as deeply as you are worrying about getting it  
5 right [*Tom laughs.*] and worry a bit more about showing you've read the nice books and >>  
6 **S1:** << No, I don't try to find the right answer. I just try to find how can I organise my essay,  
7 I mean.  
8 **Tom:** Sure, sure. Uhm, so if you divide the theories of Enlightenment into secularism,  
9 human rights and something else that might be one way to organise your essay. You might  
10 look at it from the point of view of Western countries and non-Western countries: that is a  
11 different way to organise your essay. Something like that that just breaks it into easy pieces,  
12 and you tell your reader: I'm gonna do this, this and this. It might not lead to the perfect  
13 answer, but it's a clearly understandable structure. That's my point.  
14 **Tom:** Did that help?  
15 **S1:** Yea. [*Student laughs.*]  
16 **Tom:** I've answered an Enlightenment question! [*Tom laughs.*]

In this extract Tom's representation of essay writing makes many references to subject content. Not only does Tom refer to the Enlightenment ideas, but he also offers two possible ways of organising the essay based on either some topic based division of *the theories of Enlightenment into secularism, human rights and something else* (lines 8-9) or on relevance of these ideas to societies in various geopolitical contexts, i.e. [*in*] *Western countries and non-Western countries* (line 10). However, what stands out in his representation is the framing he offers for the process of essay structuring and engaging with the subject content. Tom, in his own words, says that students will *be judged on* (lines 2-3): *using appropriate ideas, organising it well, nice paragraphing* (line 3), *showing [they've] read the nice books* (line 5), *something like that that just breaks it into easy pieces* (line 11) and offers *a clearly understandable structure* (lines 13). This representation emphasises surface features of the text structure and seems to indicate only a superficial engagement with disciplinary knowledge. Even though Tom explicitly refers to discipline specific ideas relevant to the essay question (lines 8-11), in his advice he gives prominence to generic representation of essay writing

(lines 2-5, and 11-13) and as such lessens the importance of engagement with subject content and seems to emphasise text structure.

In extract 3, this carefully outlined picture hinges on four words: *to a certain extent* (lines 2 and 4). Taking a *representational point of view*, it can be inferred from this modalised phrase that Tom attempts to mitigate his stance with regard to the offered representation. He states that his representation is limited to features of writing that *will not lead to the perfect answer* (lines 12-13) but will allow the students to pass through the examiner's criteria (lines 2-3). The premise of this representation is based on the assumption that the essay questions can be answered differently depending on a position taken by the writer: *I think it's a question, and there is no right answer for this, right. And to most of those questions, there is no right answer for this* (lines 1-2). However, Tom's representation does not engage with this aspect of essay writing. In Tom's sessions the process of essay writing that involves actual engagement through exploring ideas, concepts and issues included in the essay titles remains unexplained and unexplored. His representation only hints that, to a certain, to some or possibly to a considerable extent, this process could look differently.

#### Summary of Tom's representations of academic writing support

Sessions with Tom provide an insight into *what is going on* in the writing support classes offered, at the institutional level, as separated from the academic modules. Even when a writing tutor, like Tom, makes an explicit effort to place the assignment writing in the students' disciplinary area at the centre of his teaching, the support offered seems to reflect writing provision focused on 'the more visible 'common sense' notions of what academic writing is or should be' (Lillis, 2006, p. 32), such as, for example, surface texts structure as presented in Tom's teaching. Even though Tom makes an effort to represent writing as an interplay between text and disciplinary knowledge, this interplay is presented as rather fuzzy and ambiguous. Namely, in extracts 1-3, discussed in this section, it is first claimed that text and the knowledge it embodies can be viewed as separate entities (as in extract 1, lines 23-24), but at the same time this claim is contradicted by the tutor himself each time he offers an example or an explanation of how to deal with developing an essay structure (as in extract 2, lines 12-15 or extract 3, lines 8-11). In fact, findings offered from the analysis of the focal extracts in this section seem to indicate that the writing tutor is

struggling while making a pedagogic effort to assist students in developing an ability to construct knowledge as a part of their endeavours to address a given essay question. It can be argued, therefore, that attempting to align the support offered in writing classes with the demands of essay writing in a given academic module tends to emphasise the notion of 'writing as [a] technical and instrumental' skill (Street, 2004, p.14) rather than engagement with disciplinary ways of writing knowledge, which is something that academic tutors expect from student writing (Lea & Street, 1998).

#### **4.2.2 Sue's session on exam writing**

The example from Sue's session on exam writing includes a session focused on giving feedback to students on their SCS mock exam responses and engaging in the corrective work aimed at enhancing the quality of students' academic writing compiled under timed conditions. There were 10 students present in this session, but only 6 from the beginning. For the session Sue prepared a hand-out (see Appendix 4.6) which consisted of discrete sentences extracted from students' exam responses that illustrate problems with their writing. While teaching this class, Sue used the computer for typing corrected versions of student sentences and displaying them via a projector on the whiteboard.

This session took place on 2010-05-21, lasted approximately 91 minutes and comprised the following phases (for a more detailed description of each phase see Appendix 4.5):

- 1) Tutor welcoming the students (2 min approx.)
- 2) Tutor returning feedback on SCS mock exam/timed-writing (7 min approx.)
- 3) Tutor setting up individual/pair work by distributing a hand-out (see Appendix 4.6) with sentences from students' timed writing and by asking the students to correct first 10 sentences in the hand-out (1 min approx.)
- 4) Students work individually or in pairs on the sentence corrections (3 min approx.)
- 5) Tutor reuniting the class and leading a discussion focused on correcting students' sentences (68 min approx.)
- 6) Tutor setting up individual work focused on improving their grammatical correctness in mock exams (1 min approx.)
- 7) Students working individually on their grammar with tutor offering any needed advice (8 min approx.)
- 8) Tutor summing up the session (1 min approx.)



In the focal session discussed here, Sue represents the task of writing exam responses at the level of discrete sentences with prominence being given to surface language features, such as spelling, grammar and vocabulary. In her representation she refers to subject content mostly in order to make the sentences more specific in terms of precision of expression. Sue rarely extends this meaning-making focus to represent language features as discipline specific resources of constructing knowledge. I will illustrate these representations by drawing on three extracts of classroom interaction as well as by referring to the requirements stated in the SCS mock exam paper.

Writing an exam answer (1): language use and subject content

In Sue's session, the teaching time was devoted to enhancing the quality of student exam writing by working on sentence level issues. As mentioned earlier, for this session Sue prepared a hand-out which consisted of 31 separate sentences extracted from students' exam responses and presented without any additional reference to students' papers. Sue distributed the hand-out to all the students and engaged with them in corrective work. Extract 4 provides an example of this type of work. It is taken from the beginning of phase 5. At this stage Sue asked the students to focus on the first student sentence from the hand-out (see Appendix 4.6): *It's principle was the equal rights between the two sexes*.

**Extract 4** (recording time: 19`04``-21`52``)

- 1 **Sue:** First one. What is the grammar mistake?
- 2 **S1:** 'the', 'the equal right'
- 3 **Sue:** We can get rid of 'the', OK, so [*a student comes in and says 'hello'*] OK, you can get
- 4 rid of 'the' although I would say we need to do some other work to the sentence, OK? First
- 5 mistake though: 'it's' doesn't have an apostrophe.
- 6 **S1:** The apostrophe
- 7 **Sue:** OK, why not? When do we only use an apostrophe with it?
- 8 **S1:** In informal?
- 9 **Sue:** 'It is' – it's only used with contractions. OK, so possessive, belonging to something,
- 10 doesn't use an apostrophe, OK? So, 'it's' an apostrophe means 'it is'. And this is not what
- 11 they mean here: they mean 'its principle' - the principle belonging to it, OK? So, first let's
- 12 correct it, then, and then we'll change it. [*Sue types: Its principle was equal rights between*
- 13 *sexes.*]. Now, '*between the two sexes*' is a bit strange, but it's not wrong grammatically, but
- 14 we'll probably change it. OK, however, how we can nominalise this, make a noun out of it?
- 15 Sexu...? Sexual...? What? Eee?
- 16 **S2:** -quality
- 17 **S3:** Equality
- 18 **Sue:** OK, good. [*Sue types: Sexual equality was the goal*] OK, so 'its principle' or you could
- 19 even say, I think it's talking about 'feminist' [*Sue types: 'feminist'*] and if you want to be

- 20 even more academic [Sue types: 'primary', which completes the sentence: Sexual equality  
21 was the primary feminist goal.].  
22 **S4:** OK  
23 **Sue:** OK, do you see what we've done?  
24 **S4:** We've changed the structure.  
25 **Sue:** Yea, so, always think about it; if there are strong nouns you can use, and then you can  
26 add something actually meaty into the sentence rather than 'people are', 'they like', 'the the  
27 the', OK? Immediately 'equal rights between the sexes' – 'sexual equality', OK?  
28 **S3:** Uhm  
29 **Sue:** Obviously, you don't want to just keep repeating it, sometimes you may want to say  
30 'equal rights', but always think of how to say things in a minimal but simple way.

In this extract, Sue's representation of writing in exams is twofold: on the one hand, her representation comprises surface level language features, such as spelling and grammar; on the other hand, her representation extends to include the use of linguistic resources as tools in expressing subject content with higher degree of precision.

The representation of writing on the surface language level is signalled by Sue in her initiation moves: *What is the grammar mistake?* (line 1), *First mistake though: 'it's' doesn't have an apostrophe.* (lines 4-5), *When do we only use an apostrophe with?* (line 7), *how can we nominalise this, make a noun out of it?* (line 14). Her focus on surface language features can also be inferred from Sue's extended explanations offered to students in her evaluation moves. Sue gives detailed explanations regarding the spelling of 'its': *'It is' –it's only used with contractions. OK, so possessive, belonging to something, doesn't use an apostrophe, OK? So, 'it's' an apostrophe means 'it is'. And this is not what they mean here: they mean 'its principle' – the principle belonging to it, OK?* (lines 9-11). She also offers an explanation regarding the use and function of complex noun phrases: *Yea, so, always think about it; if there are strong nouns you can use, and then you can add something actually meaty into the sentence rather than 'people are', 'they like', 'the the the', OK? Immediately 'equal rights between the sexes' – 'sexual equality', OK?* (lines 25-27).

The representation of writing that signals engagement with subject content and the use of linguistic resources in the meaning making can be inferred from lines 18-21: [Sue types: *Sexual equality was the goal*] *OK, so 'its principle' or you could even say, I think it's talking about 'feminist' [Sue types: 'feminist']' and if you want to be even more academic [Sue types: 'primary', which completes the sentence: Sexual equality was the primary feminist goal.].* Here Sue adds two adjectives *feminist* and *primary* to

a noun *goal*. These insertions go beyond surface language features as the two adjectives are introduced into this sentence based on Sue's recollection of the subject content of the student's paper which the focal sentence in this extract has been excerpted from. Sue signals that by saying: *I think it's talking about 'feminist'* (line 19). Sue is not sure; she draws on her memory *thinking* that the student paper covered issues related to a *feminist* perspective on sexuality. This use of subject content here aims at condensing the meaning and showing students *how to say things in a minimal but simple way* (line 30). It is also worth noticing that this reference to the subject content is not explicitly explained to the students and can be seen almost as a digression. It may also be confusing for students who did not read and who have not been presented with the student paper that is being referred to. As a result, this reference to the subject content may be either overlooked or simply misunderstood.

The two elements in Sue's representation, namely surface language features and reference to subject content, calling upon the use of linguistic resources in the meaning making process related to a given subject to which the essay question refers are portrayed with a varied degree of commitment. Sue's stance on achieving language level correctness can be viewed as rather strong. She starts her discussion of that sentence with surface features of spelling and grammar. When in line 8 one of the students offers a response that is not helpful in arriving at the correct spelling of the pronoun 'its', Sue in line 9 somewhat 'ignores' (Mercer, 1995, p. 33) the student's contribution and proceeds to explaining rules for the correct spelling of 'its'. This execution of her evaluation move in the classroom triadic dialogue strongly indicates that the corrective work should be first at the level of language and that it should not focus on any other issues that students may choose to bring into the discussion. Sue's commitment to building complex noun phrases and hence condensing the meaning is equally strong. In lines 19-21 once she has built a noun phrase with two pre-modifying attributive adjectives: *primary feminist goal*, Sue uses a discourse-relative marker of evaluation (Fairclough, 2003, p. 172): *if you want to be even more academic* (lines 19-20) when she explains that the quality of students' writing will improve when they engage in this type of work. *Being academic* is obviously extremely desirable for the students who are studying on the Pre-Masters Programme and are seeking admittance to UK postgraduate programmes. Sue's strong commitment to the language level work can also be inferred from her use of prescriptive statements: *always think about it* (line

25) and *always think of how to say things in a minimal but simple way* (line 30). This way of expressing her stance indicates Sue's strong commitment (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168) to the view that the language features discussed in this extract are desirable in students' exam answers.

The representation of exam writing oriented towards meaning making and taking account of subject content is given less prominence than the surface language level work. When bringing in the subject content to the revision work, Sue expresses herself very tentatively using a weak modal verb 'could' and subjectively marked I-statement 'I think': *you could even say, I think it's talking about 'feminist'* (lines 18-19). Moreover, she refers to the subject content only once in nearly three minutes of corrective work on the sentence spending the majority of time engaging with the surface language level improvements.

As evidenced in the presented analysis of extract 4, Sue in her representation somewhat privileges surface features over the use of linguistic resources in the process of meaning making. In extract 4, subject content is used only to *add something actually meaty into the sentence* (line 26). The meaning making with regard to a given subject content is represented on the level of achieving precision of expression, that is showing students how to 'be specific' about meaning. Such reference to subject content can be observed in seven (out of a total of thirty one) sentences discussed in this session. For example, when working on the sentence *Nowadays poverty appears everywhere*, Sue points out to students that *everywhere* needs to be replaced with a more specific wording. She suggests the following: *Most countries, developed or developing, have some levels of poverty* (recording time: 23`53``-26`30``). In her representation of the engagement with subject content in exam writing, Sue also extends this meaning making focus to represent language features as discipline specific resources of constructing knowledge. Extract 5 provides an example of such representation. In this extract Sue discusses with the students the following student sentence from the hand-out: *When we suffer the recession of the economy, there are plenty of citizens lose their jobs*.

**Extract 5** (recording time: 71`06``-73`56``)

- 1 **Sue:** What's the noun phrase '*recession of the economy*'? (.) '*recession of the economy*' two  
2 words.  
3 **SS:** [no response]  
4 **Sue:** 'E'...c'mon business people!  
5 **S1:** What's, what's, what's the question?  
6 **Sue:** Noun phrase '*recession of the*'  
7 **S2:** Economical recession [Sue types: *Economic recession*]  
8 **S3:** Economic recession  
9 **Sue:** Now, '*plenty of citizens lose their jobs*', one word?  
10 **SS:** Unemployment  
11 [Sue types '*unemployment*']  
12 **SS:** Unemployment  
13 **Sue:** Thank you  
14 **Sue:** Always?  
15 **S3:** Usually  
16 **S4:** Most of the time  
17 **Sue:** [Sue types the corrected version: '*Economic recession often leads to increased*  
18 *unemployment.*'] OK ...Yea, so '*plenty of*', '*plenty of*' – very informal, isn't it. 'I've got  
19 *plenty of time, don't worry.*' We use it in speaking. We don't really use it in writing.

In this extract, similarly to extract 4, Sue represents exam writing on the level of surface language features, here flagged as the use of vocabulary. However, on the level of meaning making Sue's representation extends to include the use of linguistic resources in a way characteristic of a given academic discipline.

The representation of exam writing that emphasises surface language features can be inferred from Sue prompting students to correct vocabulary related issues. First students are asked to change the prepositional phrase *recession of the economy* into a two word noun phrase: *What's the noun phrase 'recession of the economy'? (.) 'recession of the economy' two words* (lines 1-2). When that has been achieved, Sue asks students to express the meaning of a lengthy prepositional phrase '*plenty of citizens lose their jobs*' in *one word* (line 9). In line 14 Sue hints to the students the value of using hedges, and in lines 18-19 she suggests to students that they should avoid using informal expressions in their academic writing which are characteristic of spoken language: '*plenty of*', '*plenty of*' – *very informal, isn't it. 'I've got plenty of time, don't worry.'* *We use it in speaking. We don't really use it in writing.* Her stance indicates low desirability of such expressions in writing: Sue uses a discourse-relative marker of evaluation: *very informal* (line 18), which in the context of academic writing has negative connotations.

Sue's representation of exam writing as engagement in meaning making and using linguistic resources in a way preferred in a given academic discipline can be inferred from her calling upon *business people* (line 4). The focal sentence of this interaction deals with issues related to economy. For that reason when attempting to change the wording of the sentence, Sue singles out students who are taking the Commerce Administration module suggesting that they should know vocabulary characteristic of Business Studies that would be helpful in the corrective work on that sentence. However, students seem not to make that connection, and in line 5 one of the students, somewhat confused, says: *What's, what's, what's the question?* Sue repeats her elicitation Noun phrase '*recession of the*' (line 6), and when she receives the expected answer, in her evaluation move she just accepts it (she types it – line 7) without explicitly explaining to the students why the *business people* were called upon. It can be, therefore, inferred that even though Sue acknowledges the discipline specificity of the meaning making process, her representation of academic writing as using linguistic resources in ways characteristic to given academic disciplines remains implicit and unexplored.

A similar example of calling upon students who belong to a given discipline happens only once more in this session. When working on the sentence: *Absolute poverty is insufficient of having main factors for human beings*, Sue calls upon students who are taking the Law module: *insufficient evidence, lawyers where are the lawyers?* (recording time: 26':88'' - 27':47''). Sue addresses *the lawyers* rather unexpectedly without the sentence dealing explicitly with legal matters. The *lawyers*, in fact, seem not to understand why they were invited to speak and do not answer to Sue's invitation to speak.

#### Writing an exam answer (2): emphasising surface language features

In Sue's session the focus on surface language features tends to be given more prominence than the meaning conveyed in the subject content of a given sentence. Extract 6 below gives an example of that. Sue is working with the students on the correction of the following sentence: *Not only the people loss their life, but also the government loss huge money.*

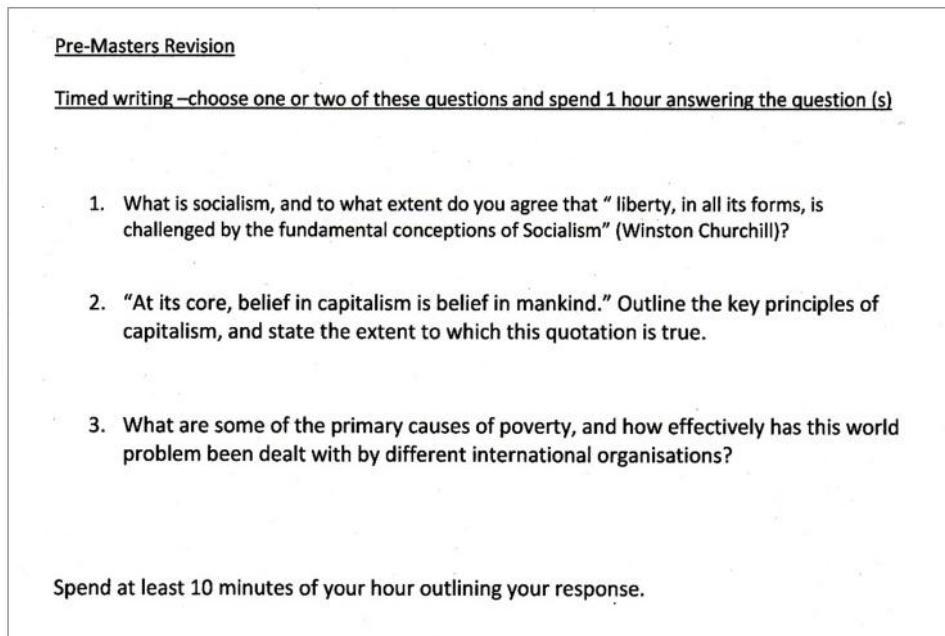
**Extract 6** (recording time: 49':42''-52'40'')

- 1 **Sue:** OK, next one.  
2 **S1:** *'the'*  
3 **Sue:** Someone is really trying to use complicated grammar but not succeeding quite.  
4 **SS:** (unclear)  
5 **S1:** *'the'*  
6 **S2:** *'the'* (.2'') not only people  
7 **S3:** Not only people lose their life  
8 **Sue:** Not only but do people  
9 **S4:** *'but'*  
10 **Sue:** How do you spell 'lose'?  
11 **SS:** (unclear whisper)  
12 **S4:** But, Sue you have two different subjects, how can they be compare together? Like  
13 people, like people >>  
14 [*Sue types: Not only do people lose, but governments also lose*]  
15 **Sue:** <<OK. Let's look at the grammar, and then let's look whether it's a good sentence or  
16 not. It's kind of possible. (.5'') [*Sue types*] OK, it's usually used with the same subject.  
17 You're right.

Extract 6 refers to the fourteenth sentence on the hand-out and as can be seen from this instance of classroom interaction by now students seem to know that they should start their work from correcting language level issues. At the beginning of this extract Sue prompts the students only by calling out the next sentence: *OK, next one* (line 1), and one of the students responds by pointing at a possible language issue: the definite article *the* (line 2). This focus on surface language features in Sue's representation is illustrated even more strongly towards the end of that extract in lines 12-17. In line 12 one of the students chooses not to answer Sue's question: *How do you spell 'lose'?* (line 10), but instead enquires whether the sentence that Sue is trying to correct is logical in meaning: *But, Sue you have two different subjects, how can they be compare together? Like people, like people* (lines 12-13). In Sue's following evaluation move, she chooses not to fully endorse the student's suggestion and refocuses the discussion on language features: *OK. Let's look at the grammar, and then let's look whether it's a good sentence or not* (lines 15-16). Even though later in the same evaluation move Sue admits that the sentence may be faulty in terms of logic: *OK, it's usually used with the same subject. You are right* (lines 16-17), the final 'correct' version does not take the student's suggestion into consideration. The correction that Sue eventually arrives at reads: *Not only people lose their lives, but governments also lose huge amounts of money*. This example speaks strongly towards the representation of writing requirements that privileges surface language features over other possible factors.

Based on the analytical accounts presented thus far, what emerges from Sue's session is a representation of writing that is mainly on the level of discrete sentences and prioritises surface language features over subject content and meaning making. Even though the two latter elements are brought into the corrective work in this session, they are given much less prominence and lesser commitment on the part of the writing tutor. It is the surface language features that are elaborated on and receive most attention. Placing that representation into the frames of the task that students were engaged in while writing their mock exams offers yet another insight into *what was going on* in Sue's session. Figure 4.2 below shows instructions for SCS mock exam questions that students were expected to choose from and write a response for.

**Figure 4.2 SCS mock exam questions**



Pre-Masters Revision

Timed writing –choose one or two of these questions and spend 1 hour answering the question (s)

1. What is socialism, and to what extent do you agree that “liberty, in all its forms, is challenged by the fundamental conceptions of Socialism” (Winston Churchill)?
2. “At its core, belief in capitalism is belief in mankind.” Outline the key principles of capitalism, and state the extent to which this quotation is true.
3. What are some of the primary causes of poverty, and how effectively has this world problem been dealt with by different international organisations?

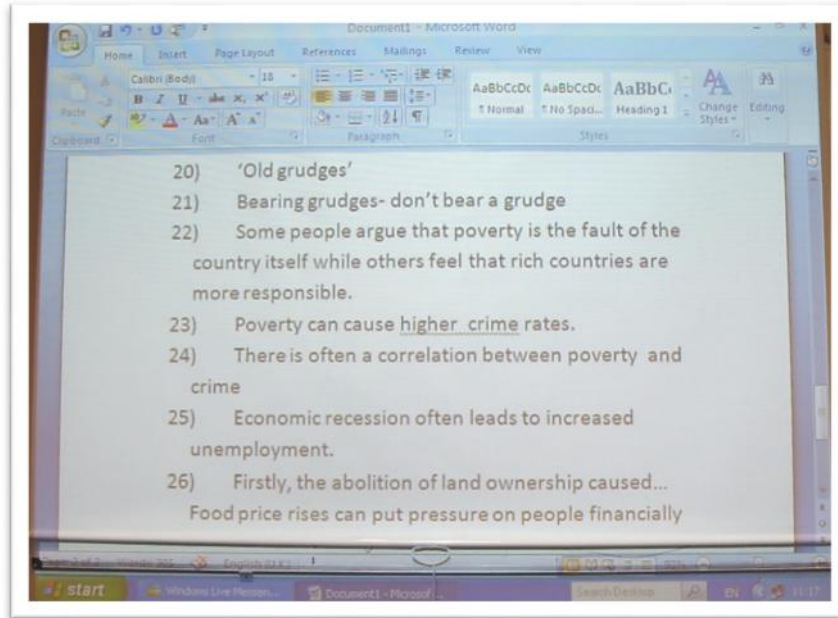
Spend at least 10 minutes of your hour outlining your response.

All of the exam questions emphasized the need to engage with disciplinary content, the ability to define or outline key concepts, and the competence to discuss the questions with a high degree of criticality. The instructions suggest that students should spend 10 minutes of their exam time on outlining their responses, which indicates that the expectation is for students to produce a coherent prose rather than offer an answer, for example, in bullet points or discrete sentences. These requirements stand in a rather startling contrast to the support students received in the feedback session. Engagement at the level of the sentence was not only introduced by the hand-out Sue prepared for the session, but it was maintained in class procedures and in



corrective practice. The sentence level corrective work focused on surface features and was additionally reinforced by Sue typing the sentences and displaying them for students on the whiteboard (see Figure 4.3). She also emailed an electronic copy of that work (see Appendix 4.7) to all the students in her group.

**Figure 4.3 Whiteboard snapshot: Corrective work on students' mock exams**



Summary of Sue's representations of academic writing support

Based on the evidence presented in the analytical accounts in this section, it can be stated that the representation offered by Sue with regard to answering exam questions reveals a considerable level of imbalance between corrective work focused on surface language features and requirements set out for students in their exam paper. According to these requirements, the students are expected to show ability to engage in a critical discussion which is to be presented during an exam in the form of a well-planned, continuous piece of academic prose. The support offered to students as preparation for these requirements prioritises surface language level work within discrete sentences and appears not to take into account the fact that 'writing is more than constructing accurate sentences' (Kiely, 2013, p. 2). It can be argued, therefore, that regardless of Sue's great effort evidenced in engaging in a detailed corrective work, such support may not be sufficient in preparing students to respond to the complex exam questions they are required to address. The support offered seems to 'assume that [academic] literacy is a set of atomised skills which students have to learn and which are then

transferable to other contexts' (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 158), and that these skills in themselves constitute adequate preparation for the demands of disciplinary writing.

#### **4.2.3 Peter's sessions on academic critique**

The sessions with Peter stand out from the two previous cases as in the teaching to be discussed here students were being prepared for a summative assignment not in their subject modules but in their writing classes; the process, however, did involve students' engagement with disciplinary knowledge. The assignment that students worked on was a critique of an academic article. The article for the critique was to be selected by the students themselves; the only limiting condition given to them was for the article to be chosen from their academic fields, and as such it should represent their affiliation to specific academic disciplines. In other words, the students worked towards an assessment in their writing support classes, but at the same time they individually worked within their academic disciplines. The account in this section draws on three consecutive sessions that took place in the fourth week of the winter term. The teaching focus of the three sessions was on 1) the structuring of the critique, 2) the use of linguistic resources in the meaning making process, and 3) the role of reading in writing. All sessions were very well attended. There were 12 students present in sessions 1 and 2, and 14 students in session 3. The teaching materials used in these sessions included academic articles, critique samples written by students in previous years and an example of tutor feedback on one of the critiques. The materials that support my discussion in this chapter have been included in Appendices 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14.

The first session took place on 2010-01-25, lasted approximately 90 minutes and comprised the following phases (for a more detailed description of each phase see Appendix 4.8):

- 1) Tutor introducing the session content (1 min approx.)
- 2) Tutor setting-up pair work focused on discussing text structure, language use and referencing conventions in two sample critiques (6 min approx.)
- 3) Students working in pairs (12 min approx.)
- 4) Tutor reuniting the class and leading a whole class discussion aimed at providing comments and feedback on students' pair work (39 min approx.)
- 5) Tutor answering questions regarding the two sample critiques discussed earlier in class (3 min approx.)
- 6) Tutor setting up pair-work aimed at peer-reviewing students' summaries (1 min approx.)
- 7) Students working in pairs (20 min approx.)
- 8) Tutor reuniting the class and giving feedback on pair-work (7min approx.)
- 9) Tutor summing up the session (1 min approx.)

The second session took place on 2010-01-26, lasted approximately 90 minutes and comprised the following phases (for a more detailed description of each phase see Appendix 4.9):

- 1) Tutor introducing the session content (1 min approx.)
- 2) Tutor setting-up individual work focused on students writing the outlines of their critiques (1 min approx.)
- 3) Individual writing (8 min approx.)
- 4) Tutor reuniting the class and offering explanation on the importance of audience in academic critiques (3 min approx.)
- 5) Tutor leading a whole class discussion on students' progress with critique writing, with particular focus on critical reading (12 min approx.)
- 6) Tutor setting up a pre-reading pair work aimed at brainstorming ideas on drug development process (2 min approx.)
- 7) Students working in pairs (3 min approx.)
- 8) Tutor reuniting the class and leading a discussion on drug development process (3 min approx.)
- 9) Tutor setting-up individual reading of articles on pharmaceutical companies (6 min approx.)
- 10) Silent reading (11 min approx.)
- 11) Tutor setting up a small group discussions on the content of the articles (2 min approx.)
- 12) Small group discussion (10 min approx.)
- 13) Tutor setting up pair-work aimed at students critically discussing both articles (1 min approx.)
- 14) Students working in pairs (10 min approx.)
- 15) Tutor reuniting the class and explaining the positions taken by the authors in both articles (10 min approx.)
- 16) Tutor summing up the session (1 min approx.)

The third session took place on 2010-01-29, lasted approximately 90 minutes and comprised the following phases (for a more detailed description of each phase see Appendix 4.10):

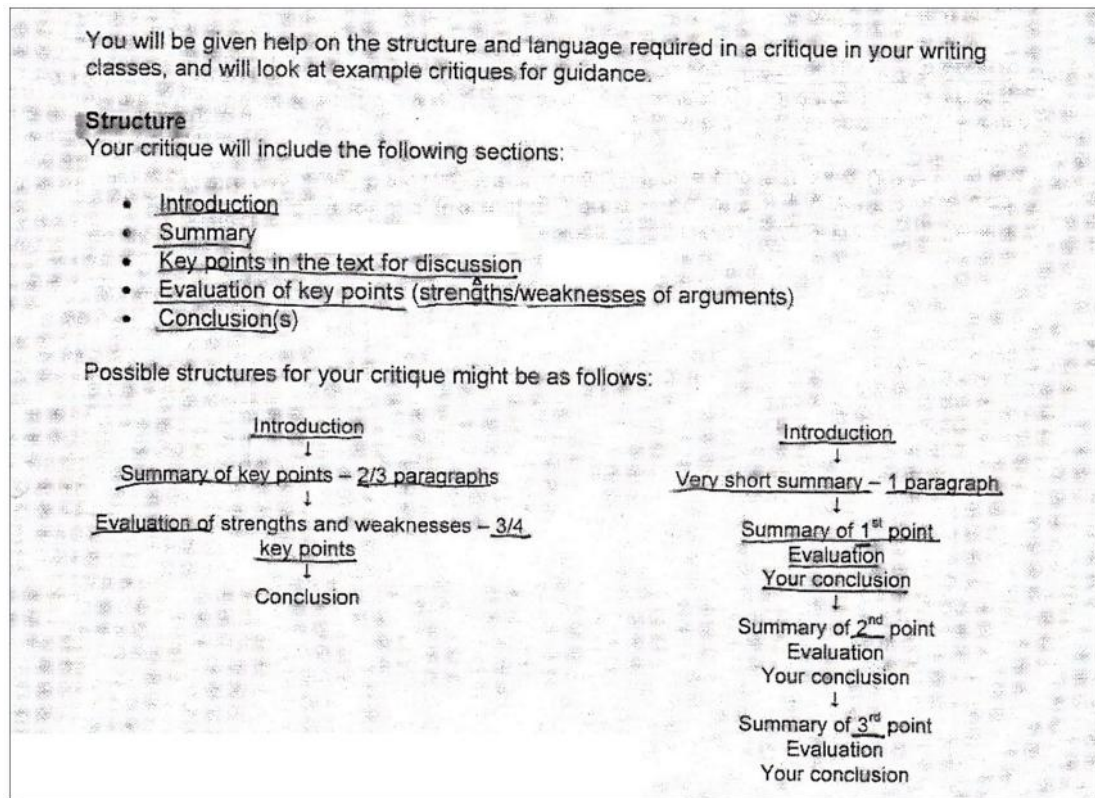
- 1) Tutor introducing the content of the session (1 min approx.)
- 2) Tutor setting up pair work aimed at peer reviewing the outlines of students' critiques (1.5 min approx.)
- 3) Students working in pairs (30 min approx.)
- 4) Tutor reuniting the class and leading a discussion on common issues with the students' outlines (7 min approx.)
- 5) Tutor setting up pair work asking students to discuss the content of the introduction of a critique (2 min approx.)
- 6) Students working in pairs (5 min approx.)
- 7) Tutor reuniting the class and leading a discussion on the introduction writing (17 min approx.)
- 8) Tutor setting up individual reading (2 min approx.)
- 9) Students reading in silence (2 min approx.)
- 10) Tutor reuniting the class and leading a discussion on the content and text structure of a critique (2 min approx.)
- 11) Tutor setting up individual reading aimed at highlighting the linking words and reporting verbs (1 min approx.)
- 12) Students reading in silence (3 min approx.)
- 13) Tutor reuniting the class and leading a discussion on the use of lexical items in the critique (6 min approx.)
- 14) Tutor distributing feedback to students on the sample critique and leads a discussion on the key points in the feedback (4 min approx.)
- 15) Tutor summing up the session (6 min approx.)

In these three sessions, Peter's representation of what is involved in academic writing is rather multifaceted and multileveled. First, Peter represents the process of writing a critique as an interplay between surface structural features and the subject content. Then, Peter's representation extends to include the use of linguistic resources as meaning making tools useful in establishing reader-writer relationships. Finally, Peter portrays the process of critique writing as rooted in reading and engaging with a given subject content. In the sections that follow, I will illustrate these representations drawing on extracts of classroom interactions.

#### *Developing a critique (1): text structure, subject content and readership*

Peter's sessions offered much practice on how to develop the text of the critique. The students would analyse sample critiques (see Appendices 4.12 and 4.13 for two examples of these sample critiques), and they were also given a detailed assignment brief (see Appendix 4.14) which had a section on the structuring of the critique, as illustrated in Figure 4.4:

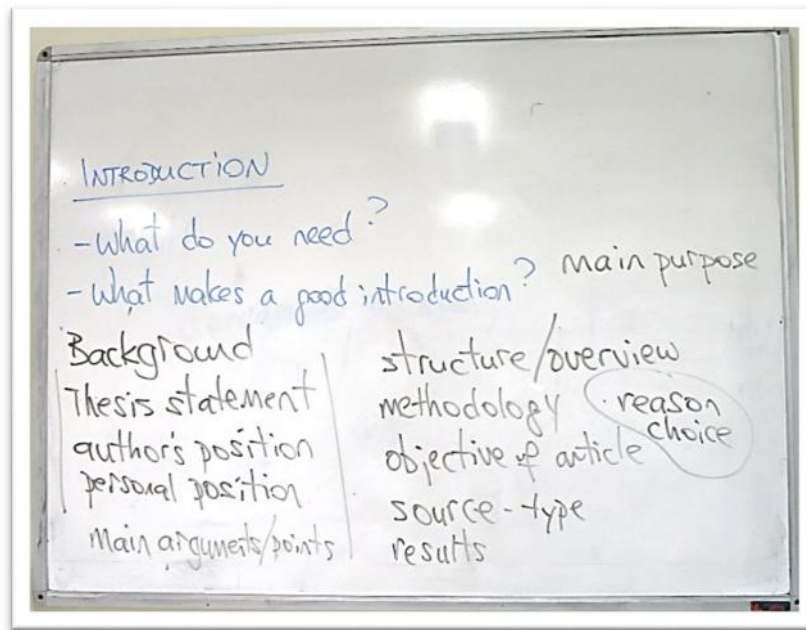
**Figure 4.4 Academic critique – Assignment brief: text structure**



Note: I received the brief for the writing of the critique from one of the students, and any marks in the section of the brief presented in Figure 4.4 and in the whole hand-out included in Appendix 4.14 were made by that student. The tutor did not have a spare critique brief to offer me. I discussed such issues related to the data collection in my Methodology Chapter 3.

The options listed in the brief highlight the surface features of the text such as ‘introduction’, ‘summary’ or ‘conclusions’. Writing classes, however, provide evidence of representation that extends beyond these surface features. Extract 7 below gives an example of such representation. The extract is taken from session 3 (phase 7). Prior to the interaction transcribed in extract 7, Peter brainstormed with the students the elements of the introduction, wrote their suggestions on the whiteboard (see Figure 4.5, p. 149), and then proceeded to discuss each of the elements in detail:

**Figure 4.5 Whiteboard snapshot: Academic critique - introduction**



**Extract 7** (recording time: 50':49''-54':12'')

- 1 **Peter:** Background. Yes or No?  
2 **SS:** Yea, yes  
3 **Peter:** How much?  
4 **SS:** 200 (unclear) [*Students speak at the same time.*]  
5 **Peter:** It's not a game! You don't win a special prize, yea? How much? How much?  
6 **S1:** One sentence  
7 **SS:** (unclear) [*Students speak at the same time.*]  
8 **Peter:** One or two sentences (unclear)  
9 **S2:** (unclear) writer (unclear)  
10 **Peter:** Yeeeeeesss, you need to explain what your topic is as well. OK.  
11 **SS:** Yes  
12 **Peter:** So, you need to put topic in a little bit of context. A little bit of context, yea? That's,  
13 that's important. Now, uhm, thesis statement. Author's position, personal position. Now,  
14 what does this mean?  
15 **S3:** (unclear) It's saying that these articles (unclear) what are talking about (unclear)  
16 **Peter:** OK.  
17 **S4:** (unclear) just what the main ide ...main sentence (unclear)  
18 **Peter:** Yes, so give some background. Gonna have to tell us [*i.e. the readers*] what the  
19 source is, you know this is going to be a critique of this article. The thesis statement, uhhhh  
20 **SS:** (unclear) what we are writing about (unclear)  
21 **Peter:** Your position, what you gonna say [*student's name*] about your position?  
22 **S5:** Your opinion about this article, is good or no good>>  
23 **Peter:** <<Yea, the earlier the better you have to say that, say it again in the conclusions and  
24 say all the way throughout your paper. So, what you need to say is that 'this paper will focus  
25 on, will disagree with the author on two points'. 'This paper will focus on X or Y throughout  
26 the paper. To do this, I will do three things, five things', or whatever you decide to do, or six  
27 things depending what you want to do.  
28 **S5:** Of course, all I need to do it to explain you>>  
29 **Peter:** <<what it is>>  
30 **S5:** <<What's the topic

- 31 **Peter:** Yes  
32 **S5:** I need to explain to you (unclear) the main topic (unclear) one sentence like an abstract  
33 *[Tutor and students talk simultaneously.]*  
34 **Peter:** Yes, a one sentence abstract would be OK. Remember you are going to do a  
35 summary afterwards  
36 **S6:** Yes  
37 **Peter:** So you don't have to go into as much detail, but you do need to mention, OK? One  
38 sentence is perfect. OK, about the argument of the original article. Ah, do you need to  
39 mention all the main arguments or points? Of of what? Of the original article, not all of  
40 them,  
41 **SS:** No, no, but  
42 **Peter:** but what you are going to do.  
43 **S8:** Author's position  
44 **Peter:** You need to mention this. This is, this is what you are going to do and this is how you  
45 are gonna do it. OK.  
46 **SS:** Yea  
47 **Peter:** 'I'm gonna do three things, four things. This paper will focus on three points or this  
48 paper will be broken down into five points.' One: summary, brief summary of the main ideas  
49 of the original article, two: weaknesses, strengths and so on and so forth, OK? Tell the  
50 reader, me, what you are going to do, OK? That's very very important. Aaaah, you might  
51 want to mention the results, I don't think it's so necessary in the introduction. You do need  
52 to mention the sources at some stage, OK? 'This is a critique of *[tutor's surname and his*  
53 *publication details]*'. You need to explain what the source is. How long? How many  
54 paragraphs? How many lines? How many words?  
55 **SS:** (unclear) Two, two (unclear) 200 words *[Students speak simultaneously.]*  
56 **Peter:** 200 words  
57 **SS:** Yes  
58 **Peter:** Yea, no more.  
59 **SS:** (unclear)  
60 **Peter:** Yea, 150 words 200 words, yea? Bear that in mind, bear that in mind, don't panic if  
61 you've got 120 or 220 or around that area, yea? You should have no more than one  
62 paragraph for the introduction, OK?

In this extract, Peter's representation of structuring operates on two levels: 1) interplay between surface text features and subject content, 2) the use of linguistic resources in the meaning making process of establishing a reader-writer relationship.

The representation of critique writing on the level of the interplay between surface text features and subject content is very detailed, matter-of-fact and rather factual. It includes the elements of the introduction, their functions (as a way of encoding the subject content into the text), how much space each of the elements should be given in the text, and what wording to use for them. For example, the background information should *explain what the topic is* (line 10) provide *a little bit of context* (line 12), and it should take one or two sentences of about 200 words altogether (lines 1-8); in a thesis statement students should include their *position, what (they) gonna*

say (line 21); for this *one sentence is perfect* (lines 37-38), and a possible wording can be as follows: *This paper will focus on three points or this paper will be broken down into five points* (lines 47-48).

Peter expands this focus on surface text features and subject content to point at the reader-writer relationship and as such to accommodate for the reader expectations. He explicitly says: *Tell the reader, me, what you are going to do. OK?* (lines 49-50). Earlier in the extract, in line 18, he also hints at the readers and says: *Gonna have to tell us [i.e. the readers]*. In other words he explains to students that they need to cater for reader expectations by guiding them through the text. It can be argued that Peter makes a move from the representation on the level of surface text features to the representation on the level of meaning-making between the student-writer with the tutor-reader. In other words, he makes an explicit move from surface features to 'hidden features' (Street, 2009) that take account of audience as an important feature of writing in the academia.

Peter's commitment to this overall representation can be inferred from the way he handles interactional exchanges with the students as well as from the linguistic choices in the statements he makes. On the interactional level, Peter consistently incorporates students' responses into his evaluation moves and as such builds the discussion on students' contributions. Such an execution of his evaluation moves in the triadic dialogue can be described as 'a discursal means of formulating and aligning meaning' (Jarvis & Robinson, 1997, p. 214). Focusing on 'reaching an agreed characterisation of what has transpired in an interaction' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 114), Peter reveals his strong commitment towards the propositional meaning conveyed in this extract. His commitment is further strengthened by his linguistic choices. Peter often uses strong modal verbs such as *need to* (lines 10, 12, 24, 37, 38, 44, 51, 53), *have to* (lines 18, 23, 37) and *should* (line 61). He also uses evaluative statements, for example: *that's important* (line 13), *that's very very important* (line 50), and directives, such as *give some background* (line 18), *say it again* (line 23), *say all the way through your paper* (line 24), *remember you are going to do summary afterwards* (lines 34-35), *tell the reader, me, what you are going to say* (lines 49-50), *bear that in mind* (line 60 – twice), *don't panic* (line 60).



Reading extract 7 through the analytical lenses of *representational meaning* (Fairclough, 2003), it is equally important to point out what is in the account and what seems to be missing in the account. Peter's account is very detailed, but at the same time it seems to be disconnected from any disciplinary context. Taking into account the requirement that students are expected to write a critique of articles from their respective academic fields, what appears to be missing in Peter's representation is a contextualisation of the discussion within the students' disciplinary fields. Will an introduction to an academic critique in the field of Law be exactly the same as the one discussed in extract 7? Will there be any difference in introductions to academic critiques in Commerce Administration and Global Politics? Peter's representation of what makes a well-written introduction does not offer any answers to these questions.

*Developing a critique (2): language use, subject content and readership*

The focus on linguistic resources as meaning making tools is given explicit attention in Peter's sessions. I will illustrate this in extracts 8 and 9 below, in which Peter analysed with students sample critiques and focused on language use. Extract 8 comes from session 3 (phase 13); extract 9 is taken from session 1 (phase 4).

**Extract 8** (recording time: 78':37''-79':45'')

(see Appendix 4.13, original p. 3, for the text analysed here)

- 1 **S1:** *'As a result of*  
2 **Peter:** *'As a result of'* yea, good. The next paragraph we've got *'Therefore, one of the*  
3 *conclusions of this report is that these nations postpone the solutions for marginalised*  
4 *groups, the human security costs will be enormous'*, OK? *'therefore'*. *'Secondly', 'it can be*  
5 *argued'* ... nice. *'It can be argued that if x then y'*. *'this argument could be a fallacy'* – good  
6 cautious language, OK, *'could be a fallacy'*. *'actually'*: *'in fact'* so stating a point,  
7 emphasising the point. *'Finally, the third problem is that Sen [the author of the article that*  
8 *was critiqued] overestimates the importance of'* something. *'the chapter'*, sorry,  
9 *'therefore', 'the chapter would have been more effective'* ... okay, cautious but also really,  
10 really nice critique language, *'would have been more effective if the author had offered more*  
11 *detail.'*

**Extract 9** (recording time: 33':31''-35':27'')

(see Appendix 4.12, original pages 2-3, for the text analysed here)

- 1 **Peter:** The next paragraph (.) oh sorry, '*in fact*'  
2 **S1:** Yea  
3 **Peter:** What's, what's, what's '*in fact*' doing?  
4 **S1:** Emphasis  
5 **Peter:** Yes, it is emphasising a point. Well done.  
6 **S2:** to explain  
7 **Peter:** Yes, it can be explaining as well. The next paragraph, '*regarding the methodology*',  
8 she's using it again.  
9 **S2:** '*although*'  
10 **Peter:** Yes  
11 **S3:** '*since*'  
12 **Peter:** Yes (.) What does '*since*' mean here?  
13 **S3:** 'because'  
14 **S4:** 'as'  
15 **Peter:** 'as' or 'because', yea, as or because. Sorry, next one, '*for example*', yeah, good.  
16 You're adding information, you're clarifying a point '*for example*', and then you fact again.  
17 Next paragraph, '*moreover*', '*adding to these*': 'in addition', 'adding to this', 'first of all',  
18 'second', OK? '*finally*', in the next one. Also, she uses at the bottom of page two, top one,  
19 '*in this regard*', '*in this regard*': 'with respect to this', 'because of this', OK? And then  
20 paragraph three, '*to sum up*'. Sorry, page three, '*to sum up*'. If you're doing a conclusion,  
21 or sorry, if you're doing... when you do your conclusion you should have a clear linking  
22 word to show that. It's a good word to sum up: 'in conclusion', 'summing up', OK?  
23 Because, you know, your teacher is (.) doesn't have the short-term, long-term memory and  
24 doesn't remember everything you've done so you've got to remind the teacher [*i.e. the*  
25 *reader*] all the time this is what I'm doing. This is what I told you. This is why I'm doing  
26 it, OK? Keep, keep reminding the reader of what you're doing, OK?

In these two extracts Peter's representation focuses on contextualised examples of language use and highlights instances where linguistic resources are used to emphasise links between ideas, signal writer's critical stance and maintain reader-writer textual relationship.

Emphasising connections between ideas seems to dominate the above examples of classroom interactions. As Peter and students read through the sample critiques, they single out phrases that are helpful in establishing links between ideas, for example: *as a result of* (extract 8, line 1). At times they also read out the context in which a given phrase is used, for example: 'The next paragraph we've got '*Therefore, one of the conclusions of this report is that these nations postpone the solutions for marginalised groups, the human security costs will be enormous*', OK? '*therefore*' (extract 8, line 2-4). Moreover, to ensure students' understanding, Peter provides explanations of a specific function a given phrase has: 'Peter: What's, what's, what's '*in fact*' doing?' /

S1: Emphasis / Peter: Yes, it is emphasising a point. Well done' (extract 9, lines 3-5). Peter reveals his strong commitment towards the use of linking phrases in student writing. Peter's references to the use of phrases signalling connections between ideas include such markers of evaluation as: *good* (extract 8, line 2; extract 9, line 15) and *well done* (extract 9, line 5). Moreover, his evaluation moves in both extracts consistently acknowledge students contributions by repetition (extract 8, line 2; extract 9, lines 5, 7, 15) and by explicit positive evaluation (extract 8, line 2; extract 9, lines 5, 7, 10, 12, 15).

Signalling writer's stance receives attention in examples of *cautious language* (extract 8, lines 4-11). Peter reads out selected examples, for instance: *it can be argued* (extract 8, lines 4-5), *This argument could be a fallacy* (extract 8, line 5). Peter indicates his commitment to the desirability of such language in student critique writing by evaluative statements: *nice* (extract 8, line 5), *good cautious language* (extract 8, lines 5-6), *really, really nice critique language* (extract 8, lines 9-10)

Finally, Peter presents language as a tool that is helpful for the writer in guiding the reader through the text (extract 9, lines 23-26). Peter points at *to sum up* (extract 9, line 20) as an example of *a clear linking word* (extract 9, lines 21-22) which helps to signal text development to the reader: *remind the teacher [i.e. the reader] all the time this is what I'm doing* (extract 9, lines 24-25). Peter indicates that such use of linguistic resources is very desirable in student writing by evaluative statement: *it's a good word to sum up* (extract 9, line 22), strong modal verbs: *should* (extract 9, line 21), *have got to* (extract 9, line 24), and directive statements: *Keep, keep reminding the reader of what you're going to do* (extract 9, line 26).

This representation goes beyond discrete elements of language use; however, when giving and discussing examples of language use, Peter does not offer any comments or any opportunities to explore how the linguistic resources analysed in these extracts can be utilised in students' chosen disciplines such as Law, Commerce or Politics. These sessions are aimed at preparing students for critiquing articles in their respective academic fields. However, the support offered in these sessions does not take into account that there could be different preferences across academic disciplines as far as, for example, expressions related to criticality are concerned. It should be pointed out,

nevertheless, that even though the subject specificity of use is not explicitly addressed in extracts 8 and 9, the writing instruction offered by Peter moves beyond surface features of ‘grammar and spelling’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158) and includes more ‘hidden features’ (Street, 2009) of academic prose, such as the notion of ‘stance’ or ‘signalling’ the development of the argument, or connecting ideas to mediate propositional meaning of a given text.

*Developing a critique (3): reading for writing*

As a key stage in the preparation for the writing of a critique, the students were advised to read their chosen articles many times and to reflect on their content. Earlier in the term students were given a hand-out (see Appendix 4.11) with suggested areas to focus on while engaging with the articles. In class students were often offered an opportunity to discuss their articles with each other and with the tutor. The extract below is an example of Peter discussing with one of the students the article she chose to critique. The extract is taken from session 2 (phase 5):

**Extract 10** (recording time 18`04``-20`10``)

- 1 **Peter:** What do you reckon? Are you in favour of this article’s position or...?
- 2 **S1:** I think so, in the end but, but actually there are missing things in the methodology.
- 3 **Peter:** Oh fantastic. Good, mistakes. That’s great. OK, that’s great.
- 4 **S1:** And I’d like to ask something maybe delete or, uhm, if I say that Monte Negro’s
- 5 succession and the referendum and that there are positive things...
- 6 **Peter:** Yeah.
- 7 **S1:** But on the other hand because she wrote the conclusion that the Americans they have an
- 8 interest to weaken European Union, and that’s why they criticised
- 9 **Peter:** Yea
- 10 **S1:** the European Union but the European Union has an interest, had an interest in (unclear)
- 11 referendum as well
- 12 **Peter:** Yes
- 13 **S1:** So...
- 14 **Peter:** So, she didn’t mention that.
- 15 **S1:** Ahhh
- 16 **Peter:** Do you think she should have mentioned that?
- 17 **S1:** Basically that, that the European Union should have influenced the outcome of the
- 18 referendum
- 19 **Peter:** Uhm
- 20 **S1:** But in my opinion the European Union has an interest because Monte Negro has the sea
- 21 **Peter:** Yea
- 22 **S1:** the Adriatic Sea is a very important strategy
- 23 **Peter:** Absolutely, so she didn’t mention that and you think that she should have – she made
- 24 a mistake with that?
- 25 **S1:** That the European Union’s interest as well.
- 26 **Peter:** Can you get an article to support that idea of yours?
- 27 **S1:** I think actually I can

- 28 **Peter:** Well then that's brilliant. That's exactly what you're looking for.  
29 **S1:** But, OK, but it's also a strength  
30 **Peter:** Because?  
31 **S1:** Because the European... because of the European Union's softer powers.  
32 **Peter:** Okay, mention that.  
33 **S1:** So, it's a problem that on one hand it's a strength, and on the other hand it's a weakness.  
34 **Peter:** Use the language that you wanted to. That's a nice question. Sometimes you're  
35 going to find an issue that could be a strength and could be a weakness. So, what you say,  
36 using the language that you want to use, is: 'well despite the fact that... even though this  
37 could be viewed as a strength there are also signs of weaknesses because of this'. And that's  
38 fine, that's great. You're analysing the opinion of the writer very, very well. Okay, so that  
39 sounds good.

In this extract Peter represents reading as critical engagement which then informs student writing. The extract begins with Peter asking about the student's stance towards the content presented in the article she chose for her critique: *Are you in favour of this article's position or ...?* (line 1). When the student shares her position and points at certain weak areas in the article: *actually there are missing things in the methodology* (line 2), the tutor very positively evaluates the student's critical approach: *Oh fantastic. Good, mistakes. That's great. OK, that's great* (line 3). This, in turn, encourages the student to elaborate on her position (lines 4-15). Peter supports the student in developing her critical perspective by asking referential questions: *Do you think she should have mentioned that?* (line 16), *so she didn't mention that and you think that she should have – she made a mistake with that?* (lines 23-24). Once the student's position has become relatively clear, Peter moves on to the application of that engagement with reading to writing. He asks whether the student can provide support for her position: *Can you get an article to support that idea of yours?* (line 26). When the student answers positively, Peter in his evaluation move explicitly states high desirability of such engagement with reading: *Well then that's brilliant. That's exactly what you're looking for* (line 28). At that point, Peter's representation turns exclusively to writing, and he offers advice to the student on how to express her stance, and even suggests possible wording: *Sometimes you're going to find an issue that could be a strength and could be a weakness. So what you say, using the language that you want to use is: 'well, despite the fact that...even though this could be viewed as a strength there are also signs of weaknesses because of this'* (lines 34-37).

Throughout that extract Peter reveals his strong commitment towards the emerging representation of critique writing as rooted in student's critical engagement with the focal text. Peter's commitment can be inferred from highly positive evaluative

statements in which this extract is abundant: *Oh fantastic. Good, mistakes. That's great. OK, that's great* (line 3), *Well then that's brilliant. That's exactly what you're looking for* (line 28), *That's a nice question* (line 34), *And that's fine, that's great. You're analysing the opinion of the writer very, very well. Okay, so that sounds good* (lines 37-39).

Summary of Peter's representations of academic writing support

Sessions with Peter present writing instruction offered to students in the preparation for the writing of an academic critique. For that assignment students were to choose an article from their disciplinary fields and then write a paper critiquing their chosen article. Writing support offered to students included the focus on text structure but extended beyond the surface textual features by attracting students' attention to the functions that structural features play in communicating the propositional content (extract 7) and by explicitly stating the role of various linguistic devices in showing writer's stance, indicating links between ideas and signalling to the reader how the propositional content is developing (extracts 7, 8, 9). Moreover, Peter's sessions emphasised the importance of engagement with reading in the process of writing (extract 10). Taking into account the findings reported from Peter's sessions, it can be argued that writing classes can offer students more than simply focus on surface features of text and language. The classes can, indeed, help students develop a certain level of familiarity with more 'hidden features' (Street 2009) helpful in constructing a convincing and reader-oriented piece of academic prose. Additionally, as indicated in particular in extract 10, writing classes can be helpful in assisting students in becoming more familiar with the role that reading plays in successful academic writing. This point is much less discussed in the research literature on Academic Literacies (see Section 2.4.1). I will pursue this angle further when presenting the interview data in Chapters 5 and 6, and I will engage with it in my discussion chapter.

### 4.3 Summary of findings

This chapter presented the analysis of examples of classroom instruction of academic writing on the Pre-Masters Programme. In my account, I specifically focused on *emic perspectives* of the writing tutors and on the support offered to students with the writing of the assignments in their disciplinary fields. I discussed in total five sessions: two with Tom on essay writing in Socio-Cultural Studies, one with Sue on SCS exam writing and three with Peter on the writing of an academic critique of an article from students' chosen academic fields. The sessions were selected for closer analysis due to their explicit focus on assignment writing in academic modules or their explicit connections to students' academic disciplines. With this disciplinary framing, these sessions can be described as 'telling cases' of what is at stake when writing support aimed at assisting students with disciplinary writing is offered in writing classes taught by writing tutors who have no connections to students disciplines and who are not in the position to engage with discipline specific conventions of academic prose. For example, Tom's sessions emphasised the surface text structure and lessened the importance of student engagement with the subject content. Even though Tom made every effort to open for students the learning space by bringing in the essay writing in Socio-Cultural Studies to the classroom teaching, and by attempting to balance the content and the text structure, eventually his lack of familiarity with the subject content made him lessen the focus on the engagement with subject content while writing. Sue, in her teaching, encountered similar hindrances. She attempted to bring the disciplinary context to the classroom teaching by focusing on exam writing in Socio-Cultural Studies. However, her session appeared to have overlooked the complexity of the exam questions and focused on sentence level work with limited attention to discipline specific use of writing conventions. Finally, Peter in his sessions, attempted to extend beyond the focus on surface features of text and language and tried to introduce students to more 'hidden features' (Street, 2009) of academic writing but without explaining how resources such as transitions and the use of cautious language can be employed to mediate meaning in writing across different academic disciplines. It has to be noticed that Peter's sessions also indicated the importance of reading in developing students' writing. I will pursue 'reading as related to writing' further in other data chapters.

Overall, taking the Academic Literacies perspective (Lea & Street, 1998) on the findings presented in this chapter, it can be claimed that the teaching of writing in the examples analysed in my discussion tends to remain largely in the study skills model focused on surface textual features. It does, however, include some of the more ‘hidden features’ of academic prose (Street, 2009), and it seems to recognise the need to assist students with the disciplinary writing. It is due, perhaps, to the institutional positioning of these classes that the writing tutors may find it challenging to offer a different type of support. The next chapter will take up that point when presenting interview data with the writing and academic tutors.



## Chapter 5 - Writing and academic tutors' perceptions of assignment writing

### 5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter I analysed writing support provided to students in the writing classes offered as a part of the compulsory English Communication Modules on the Pre-Masters Programme. I discussed examples of classroom teaching which were explicitly aimed at assisting students either in responding to the demands of assessment in their academic modules or in developing their writing ability within their academic disciplines. I showed that the writing support, even when contextualised within disciplinary requirements or a specific type of assessment remained mostly at the level of generic writing skills. However, the findings also brought evidence of some focus on rhetorical functions of textual structure and of language use as well as some attention being given to the reader-writer relationship.

In this chapter I continue to explore institutional writing support on the PMP extending my investigation to include perspectives of writing tutors teaching writing support classes and academic tutors teaching both compulsory and elective academic modules. By doing so, I aim to shed light on issues related to student writing support, in particular with regard to how writing and academic tutors view what is involved in writing support, and what tutors' expectations and perspectives on student writing are. With these focal areas in mind, the discussion in this chapter contributes to the understanding of my second research question: *How do writing tutors on the one hand and academic tutors on the other hand understand writing requirements and writing support?*

The data set which constitutes the basis for the discussion in this chapter consists of ten interviews with four writing tutors and three interviews with three academic tutors (see Section 3.3.2 for details of interview data collection). The four writing tutors constitute the entire team of support staff teaching writing classes. The three academic tutors, however, constitute only a part of the academic staff that taught on compulsory and selective academic modules on the Pre-Masters Programme. When I approached academic tutors regarding their participation in my study, all of them - five in total -

initially agreed, but when they familiarised themselves more closely with the aims of my research, two of them decided that their teaching had nothing to do with writing; therefore, they preferred not to participate (see also Section 3.2.3 for an account on research participants).

When engaging with the analysis of the interviews, I was guided by my theoretical perspective expressed in the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998), and in particular I found a three-levelled model of writing support ('study skills', 'academic socialisation' and 'academic literacies') as helpful in understanding my data (see Section 2.3.3 for a description of that model). In my analytical work, I was interested in the *emic perspectives* of my participants expressed in the meaning projected in their utterances. As such I drew on approaches that allowed me to access tutors' perspectives and establish patterns of meaning emerging from the interviewees' responses (see Section 3.4.2 for specific analytical procedures). I started my analytical work with the interview data by listening to the recordings, transcribing and developing a general sense of understanding of the data. Then, I proceeded to conduct a systematic thematic analysis (Berg, 1989) and started to inductively code the data, which led to the development of main themes and sub-themes. The next step included reading the data through the lenses of *representational meaning*: paying attention to what is included and excluded in the emerging representations and how tutors position themselves with regard to the propositions they made (Fairclough, 2003). When analysing tutor commitment I paid attention to markers of modalisation and evaluation. The use of these two concepts in my analysis draws on Fairclough's characterisation of modality as an expression of speaker commitment to meaning they convey in their utterances and evaluation as an expression of speaker commitment to values (see Section 2.4.2.1 for a detailed description of these theoretical notions). Specific linguistics realisations of modality used in the analysis include a variety of modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives hedges, subjectively marked modalities, reported speech. Linguistics features associated with evaluation and used in the analysis comprise adjectives, noun phrases, adverbs, exclamations, discourse-relative statements, obligational modalities, affective evaluations and assumed values.

The organisation in this chapter reflects the findings from the thematic analysis of the interview data, and as such I start by offering a general overview of themes and sub-

themes that resulted from the analysis (Section 5.2). Then I move on to the discussion of the first theme 'writing requirements' and relevant sub-themes (Section 5.2.1). This is followed by the discussion of the second theme 'writing support' and similarly as with the first theme, the sub-themes are presented (Section 5.2.2). The discussions in these two sections are conducted comparatively taking account of interview data from both writing and academic tutors. The chapter closes with a summary of findings and conclusions (Section 5.3).

## 5.2 Discoursal representations of tutors' perceptions of writing requirements and writing support

Thematic analysis of tutor interviews resulted in establishing two main themes common across writing and academic tutor data. The themes are those of 'writing requirements' and 'model of writing support'. Table 5.1 provides a summary of these themes and associated with them sub-themes:

**Table 5.1 Themes and sub-themes: writing and academic tutors' interviews**

<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Writing requirements</b>
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Developing a well-written text</li><li>▪ Using language with appropriate precision</li><li>▪ Engaging with ideas</li><li>▪ Divergent understandings</li></ul>
<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Model of writing support</b>
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Integration of academic and writing modules</li><li>▪ Tailoring the support to students' immediate needs</li><li>▪ Supporting student writing through reading of sample texts<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▫ Reading articles</li><li>▫ Reading samples of students writing</li></ul></li></ul>

The interview data suggests that there is more overlap between perspectives taken by writing and academic tutors than initially might have been expected. Even though some differences have been identified (for example, with regard to the institutional positioning of both groups of tutors), it appears that writing and academic tutors share somewhat complementary points of view. In order to better illustrate discoursal representations of tutors' perceptions of writing requirements and writing support, I will discuss each theme and sub-theme comparatively drawing on data from both writing and academic tutors and exploring some of the similarities and differences that emerged.

### 5.2.1 Writing requirements

The first theme captures the representations of tutors' understandings of what constitutes the demands of writing on the Pre-Masters Programme. The theme offers an account of issues related to structural features of written text, the importance of language use, engagement with ideas and divergent conceptions of writing requirements. These issues are discussed in the sections that follow.

#### Developing a well-written text

Both writing and academic tutors portrayed students' ability to develop a well-written text as one of the key writing requirements. As emerged from their interview responses, writing and academic tutors' representations of textual features seemed to suggest different, yet not divergent, understandings. Namely, when articulating what constitutes 'a well-written text', both writing and academic tutors often used the same generic descriptors. The similarity in the ways that tutors describe writing requirements, regardless of their own different positioning with regard to disciplinary fields of knowledge, is represented in analytical accounts offered below.

Writing tutors characterised 'a well-written text' by referring to such elements as 'thesis statement', 'topic sentence', 'paragraphs', 'introductions' and overall 'organisation'. They usually employed these terms as if the terms were self-explanatory and unproblematically understood in any context. Extract 1 offers an example:

#### Writing tutor interview – extract 1

- 1 Sue: ...we focus on topic sentence and then ordering, cohesion and coherence, looking at a
  - 2 text, looking how the links work within a text. For example, if there's any backward
  - 3 referencing, forwards referencing within the text, outlining, how to write a strong outline.
- (lines 85-88/II)

Sue, in her account, provides a list of items that, in her opinion, are helpful in developing an academic text. She mentions not only elements of textual organisation, such as *topic sentence*, *ordering* of ideas and paragraphs (line 1) or starting the writing process with an *outline* (line 3), but she also emphasises the need to indicate how ideas are linked with one another by means of linguistic resources (line 2). She refers, in her own words, to: *cohesion and coherence* (line 1) as well as *backwards and forwards referencing within a text* (lines 2-3). Her representation does not offer much insight

into how these terms can be translated into an actual student's text. This can imply that developing 'a well-written text' could simply be a matter of student's familiarity with these generic concepts. Sue's commitment to such representation is rather strong. Her account is offered as a positive statement, which 'without modal verbs and other modal markers' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168) signals strong speaker commitment. In other words, Sue could have verbalised her thoughts saying, for example: 'we could focus on'. What Sue actually says, that is *we focus on* (line 1), 'commits her to the truth of the proposition more than possible alternatives' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 165).

Academic tutors in their accounts mentioned some of the same textual features as those listed in extract 1. They also commonly represented 'a well-written text' by describing it in terms of having a clear 'introduction', 'thesis statement', 'development' and 'conclusions'. However, it seemed that their representations of these features extended to include, at a general level though, rhetorical functions and the importance of these functions in the meaning making process. This can be inferred from extract 2:

Academic tutor interview – extract 2

- 1 Domenico: ...*the importance is first of all to have a nice introduction, to frame the topic,*
- 2 *understand which are the most important topics in the areas, and the relevant points. After*
- 3 *the development and the conclusion, so the conclusion according to me is... or to sum up a*
- 4 *little bit the discussion, the critical discussion, or to open a new perspective on a topic or*
- 5 *subject. So, the idea is when you are starting your, answering a question, always try to*
- 6 *answer and to refer to a topic in a systematic way, not just give me the straight answer or*
- 7 *the... try to see also the connection, the links with other topics.* (lines 92-100)

Domenico mentions surface elements of text structure (e.g. *introduction* – line 1, *conclusion* – line 3); he tends to present these elements as performing particular rhetorical roles in the process of constructing meaning through engaging with a response to a set question and hence showing students' understanding of a given subject area. He stresses the importance of *framing the topic* (line 1), showing an understanding of *the most important* issues (line 2), being able to select *relevant points* (line 2) and present a *critical discussion* (line 4) that possibly can *open a new perspective* (line 4). He explains that this discussion needs to be presented in a *systematic way* (line 6), and that it needs to take into consideration a broader context, i.e. *the links with other topics* (line 7). Even though Domenico makes the effort to extend beyond just a list of surface features, in his attempt to 'spell out' what he means by *a nice introduction, conclusions or discussion*, he uses general descriptive terms such as *important, relevant* (line 2), *critical* (line 4), *systematic* (line 6) or *straight*

(line 6). In his representation, Domenico does not explain what it might mean to be 'critical' or 'systematic' in a given discipline, and therefore it can be said that he offers a rather general representation of 'a well-written' text. His commitment to such representation is rather strong, which he reveals by the use of an initial evaluative statement: *the importance is* (line 1), and the use of prescriptive demands (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168) in phrases such as *always try to answer* (lines 5-6) and *try to see* (line 7). Even though such markers of evaluation and modality indicate Domenico's strong conviction, he appears to lessen his commitment by a subjectively marked modal phrase *according to me* (line 3). This can be seen as an attempt to disassociate himself from what can be generally regarded as desirable in academic writing and present his view taking a more personal stance towards the offered propositional meaning.

From the accounts outlined above, it can be inferred that writing and academic tutors tend to represent writing requirements on a general rather than discipline specific level. Even though in Domenico's account there is evidence of extending beyond surface text features to include rhetorical functions of textual structure (similarly to what Peter did in his writing class – see Section 4.2.3), the overall representation is conveyed through the use of general descriptive terms treating these terms as if they were seemingly explicit and unproblematic (see Section 1.2.2, and Lillis, 1999). The offered representation, in particular as far as academic tutors are concerned, appears to indicate that their own familiarity with what makes 'a well-written text' is rather 'tacit' (Jacobs, 2005, p. 477) and based on 'their own disciplinary history' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 162) rather than on their explicit understanding of the epistemological underpinnings of writing in a given disciplinary field.

Using language with appropriate precision

Another element of writing requirements that emerged from the tutor interview data refers to students' competent language use. Similarly to their views on textual development, here both writing and academic tutors reveal somewhat complementary representations of what it means to use language with appropriate precision.

Writing tutors tended to describe language use in terms of grammatical correctness, for example referring to 'articles', 'pronouns' or 'tenses', and rhetorical features of academic prose such as 'hedging', 'linking words' or ability to express the meaning in a succinct way. An example of such representation is offered in extract 3:

Writing tutor interview – extract 3

- 1 Sue: *They are doing their exams, and all the teachers have been saying they've got to focus*
- 2 *on the language ... they've got to be able to produce language at speed and this is the*
- 3 *trouble ... so that's really what I wanted to focus on is building clear short concise*
- 4 *sentences that don't cloud the meaning basically ...* (lines 11-38/II)

Sue describes language use at the sentence level and highlights such features as conciseness and clarity of expression (lines 3-4). She mentions that in the context of students' upcoming exams in their academic modules. It is worth observing that she does not make any references of any specific subjects that students will be taking the exams in. Her representation focuses on what is general, and possibly 'what is likely to be said' (Leung, 2005, p. 125) in all contexts. When expressing her view, Sue uses rather strong markers of modalisation: *they've got to focus* (line 1), *they've got to be able* (line 2), and an equally strong marker of evaluation *really* (line 3). This indicates that she regards students' competence in using such generic features in their writing as a necessity.

Academic tutors in their accounts also expressed the expectations that students should be able to produce clear and concise prose. However, they extended such general representations and tended to highlight the need for students to use language features that are characteristic of their given academic disciplines. Extracts 4 and 5 illustrate this:

Academic tutor interview – extract 4

- 1 Ellen: *Expectations are for clear, concise, appropriately expressed (i.e. use of business*
- 2 *language) assignments, with academic references and use of examples.* (page 1)

Academic tutor interview – extract 5

- 1 Domenico: *...the use of language is important in Law in the fact that to use correctly the*
- 2 *language in a sophisticated way you have to spend a lot of time reading articles, academic*
- 3 *articles.* (lines 416-418)

Both Ellen and Domenico represent language as a discipline specific medium of expression. Ellen, a Commerce Administration tutor, refers to *business language* (lines 1-2), and Domenico, a Law tutor, indicates that *language is important in Law* (line 1) and should be used by students as it is used in *academic articles* (lines 2-3). Both tutors when describing language use employ rather general descriptors such as adjectives *clear, concise* (extract 4, line 1) or phrases *appropriately expressed* (extract 4, line 1) and *sophisticated way* (extract 5, line 2). These terms are not helpful in understanding how clarity, conciseness or sophistication of written prose can be achieved in Commerce or Law. Both tutors, at the same time, reveal a strong commitment to this rather general representation. Ellen, instead of saying for example 'expectations seem to be', chose to convey her opinion by the use of a positive statement: *Expectations are* (extract 4, line 1), and Domenico uses the evaluative adjective *important* (extract 5, line 1) while describing the significance of language in legal studies.

As illustrated by these data, with regard to language use both writing and academic tutors offer rather similar representations. Even though academic tutors state that they expect language specific to given disciplinary fields, when they talk about language use, they mediate their meaning through very general descriptive terms, just like the writing tutors do. Academic tutors indicate that the disciplinary specificity is required (see: *use of business language* - extract 4, lines 1-2, and *the use of language is important in Law* – extract 5, line 1); however, they do not explain how this (undescribed) specificity can look like. Domenico only offers an example: students should read academic journals and try to write in similar manner (extract 5, lines 2-3). It can be inferred, therefore, that academic tutors' knowledge of academic writing conventions in their own disciplines remains 'unarticulated' (Jacobs, 2005, p. 477), and that they 'tend to refer to form in a more generic sense' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 162), in the way that the writing tutors do, as exemplified earlier in extract 3.



### Engaging with ideas

During interviews, both writing and academic tutors represented writing requirements in terms of students' ability to engage with ideas. As in the case of the issues discussed with regard to the preceding sub-theme (i.e. 'using language with appropriate precision'), the analysis of both writing and academic tutors' data revealed different yet complementary representations of what tutors view as the need to engage with ideas while responding to the demands of written assessment.

From the perspectives of the academic tutors, students' ability to engage with the subject content was the key requirement of written assignments. Specifically, in their interviews they stated that students in their writing need to draw on *the facts that are given over the course* but not in a descriptive way. The students should rather be able to *turn these facts into a good critically aware case*. Extract 6 illustrates such representation:

#### Academic tutor interview – extract 6

- 1 Domenico: ...*in their essay they have to show that they're able to make a critical analysis*
- 2 *and the reality, the critical analyses, these are not experienced lawyers. What they have to*
- 3 *do, they have to spend time in the library looking for the sources, looking how different*
- 4 *authors address a similar topic or the same topic... So, the point is to put together and to see*
- 5 *the different theories of an author on a certain point from a critical point of view, ... here*
- 6 *they have to show that really they understand critically the topic and are able to identify the*
- 7 *main, for example discussing (unclear) anyway the shortcomings, the advantages, the*
- 8 *disadvantages, how different authors refer to this topic and so on and so on and so on, so*
- 9 *it's more critical.* (lines 213-227)

Domenico's account represents writing requirements of an essay in terms of criticality (lines 1-2) and ability to consider a variety of opinions and sources on a given topic (lines 3-4). He explains that this critical engagement with the content aims at students' being able to demonstrate their in-depth understanding of the subject matter (lines 4-9). Moreover, what emerges from Domenico's representation is a discipline specific aspect of criticality. He mentions that even though the students are not *experienced lawyers* (line 2), they should aim to develop practices, through extensive reading, that will help them to acquire such legal writing skills (lines 3-4). Domenico conveys his representation using strong markers of modalisation such as a modal verb *have to* (lines 1, 3, 6). The use of modal *have to* indicates strong necessity for students to engage with writing on that critical level. Additionally, Domenico uses a marker of evaluation *really* (line 6) when he speaks about students understanding. This may

imply that in his opinion it is only through presenting a critical case that students can reveal whether or not they understand a given subject area.

Writing tutors also shared this deep-seated concern for students' engagement with ideas. However, their representation of such engagement, while it highlighted the importance of students taking a position and providing support for it, was conceptualised on the level of generic skills rather than subject specific criticality. Extract 7 provides an example:

Writing tutor interview – extract 7

- 1 Peter: *They need to know their content first of all. ... They need to have something to say. ...*
- 2 *They need to have enough support to be able to add to that; they can't just tell us what they*
- 3 *think without having any support. So, even before they start writing they have to either*
- 4 *address the question carefully or they have to have a position that they're able to talk about*
- 5 *and discuss. They need to have support that backs up their ideas and then they need to look*
- 6 *at the organisational side of it, and the organisational side of it is, 'This what I'm going to*
- 7 *write about, this is why I'm going to write about it, this is how I'm going to do it,' and then*
- 8 *constantly tell us all the way through. (lines 293-304/I)*

Peter's account represents engagement with ideas in terms of familiarity with subject content (line 1), taking a position on a given topic (line 4), substantiating the position with adequate support (lines 2-5), and being able to present the ideas in an organised manner (lines 6-8). Peter's account does not explicitly mention criticality or, for that matter, subject specific ways of presenting a critical case. Instead, his account offers a general representation of why engaging with ideas is an essential part of the writing process. As it can be inferred from his frequent use of modal verbs such as *need to* (line 1 - twice, line 2, line 5 - twice) and *have to* (lines 3 and 4), *can't* (line 2), Peter seems to be strongly convinced that the representation he projected in his account is desirable for student-writers, and that they *need to/have to* engage with ideas in the way he suggested; otherwise, they *can't* succeed in their writing.

With regard to engagement with ideas that draw on subject content, writing tutors in their interviews showed a great deal of caution. They all stated that they were not subject specialists and that discussing subject content with the students was not in their capacity. They explained that the advice they gave on students' essays is not on subject content. For example, one of the writing tutors said:

Writing tutor interview – extract 8

- 1 Peter: *Now, we can't comment on their topic choices ... but if one of my [students] has written*
- 2 *something and has clearly not answered the question ... I will, you know, will focus on*
- 3 *something like that, 'you need to answer this question, you know, have you answered the*
- 4 *question? There are three parts to this question, but you have addressed only one.'*

(lines 506-513/II)

In this extract Peter positions himself as a tutor working with writing requirements that are more at the level of addressing all the points listed in the essay question rather than as a subject specialist who points out student's partial or insufficient engagement with ideas relevant to the subject content. This representation appears to draw a line between what writing tutors can offer in writing classes, and what they are not expected to do, for example engage with content related discussions. In that sense, this representation to some extent echoes Tom's writing sessions (see Section 4.2.1) in which Tom broke the essays questions into specific focal points to ensure that students address key issues included in a given question, but he did not engage in any content related discussion. Here in extract 8, when discussing subject content in relation to student writing, Peter uses the modal verb *can't* (line 1) indicating that he does not have the capacity to engage with the disciplinary content that informs student writing. When explaining issues related to general writing technique, like carefully considering a given essay title, Peter uses the modal *will* (line 2 - twice) which signals his strong commitment to acting in the capacity of a writing tutor oriented towards more general writing support.

Two of the four writing tutors expressed a high level of anxiety when discussing with me issues in any way related to content and discipline specific writing support. One of the tutors enquired when my thesis will be completed and who will have the access to my findings. Towards the end of the interview I was explicitly asked: *When's it being written-up? Who gets to see it?* It was also explained to me that the management of the language centre where I collected my data was very strict with the writing tutors not engaging with any content related discussions with the students. This would, in their view, impinge on the accreditation of the language centre as writing tutors do not

have necessary subject specific qualifications. It was pointed out to me that: *The bosses are very strictly adamant that, you know, English language teachers will not teach content; you're not qualified to do that.*

Based on the analytical accounts with regard to students' engagement with ideas, it can be argued that both writing and academic tutors see students' familiarity with disciplinary content as integral to academic writing. While writing tutors regard their role as that of offering only general writing support (for example, helping students to decide whether they addressed all the issues put forward in a given essay question), academic tutors expect from student writers the ability to reflect in their writing a high level of critical engagement with the disciplinary content and to be able to discuss a given essay question presenting a *convincing case*. What stands out in the account offered here is that writing tutors show awareness of the fact that the support offered in writing classes is only general, and they imply that this is the case due to institutional constraints.

#### Divergent understandings

Another issue that emerged from the interview data with academic and subject tutors is related to the representation of writing requirements as a set of criteria that can be, and often are, interpreted differently by different academic tutors. Such representation, however, was more prominent in the accounts offered by support tutors teaching the writing classes.

Writing tutors represented writing requirements as governed by fluid criteria that change depending on the discipline and preferences of a given academic tutor. They often expressed their lack of familiarity with subject specific writing conventions and requirements, e.g. in Law. They would report that they are more knowledgeable regarding *general Social Science* writing requirements as these are more in line with their academic and professional background. Interestingly, the interviews revealed that even this personal understanding does not seem to be helpful when it comes to the interpretation of essay requirements in a compulsory academic module such as Socio-Cultural Studies. Extract 9 provides an illustration of that:

Writing tutor interview – extract 9

- 1 Tom: A student came to me [writing tutor] with their SCS essay [an essay for Socio-Cultural  
2 Studies module] and said that Stephen [SCS academic lecture tutor] said, "Put your  
3 conclusion in the introduction, which I did, and then Matt [SCS academic seminar tutor]  
4 marked it as 'you shouldn't do that, you've come to the conclusion too quickly.'" And there  
5 was a kind of mismatch between... and that's the kind of thing we would tell them in the  
6 writing class to do. So, they're getting this message, "Do it, do it, do it." They do it, they'll  
7 hand it in, and then the feedback comes back, "No, you shouldn't have done that," so there  
8 are these kind of inconsistencies. It's a problem; it's frustrating maybe for teachers and  
9 students. But, I always do tell the students that that's kind of real university to an extent.  
(lines 104-118/II)

In this extract Tom paints a picture of contradictory understandings that writing and academic tutors have regarding essay requirements in SCS. Tom explains that in the writing classes the students are taught to indicate their overall position at the end of introduction (lines 2-3 and line 6), which follows a somewhat generic template for introduction structuring. In contrast to that, it appears that Stephen and Matt, co-teaching on the same SCS module, have different expectations with regard to what counts as a well-written introduction. Stephen expects students to pre-empty the discussion (lines 2-3); whereas, Matt prefers that the students just signal the discussion at the end of the introduction and then lead the readers through the key points to *come to the conclusion* (line 4). In the interview Stephen explained that he and Matt share the marking and each of them chooses to act as a first marker for essay topics that they are most familiar with. This can indicate that in their judgement of how to best develop an introduction, they may be guided by specific epistemologies characteristic to the disciplinary areas that they hold expertise in. The access to the understanding of these very specific requirements is rather limited for those, like writing tutors, who are not experts in these disciplinary fields, and who therefore support students drawing on generic rather than subject specific understandings of writing requirements. This, as Tom states, may not be the most desirable situation: *It's a problem; it's frustrating maybe for teachers and students* (lines 8-9). Even though the propositions he makes in extract 9 may seem rather strong, Tom weakens his commitment to the propositional meaning by employing various markers of modality. He talks about *a kind of mismatch* (line 5), *these kind of inconsistencies* (line 8), *kind of real university to an extent* (line 9).

A similar representation of divergent understandings of writing requirements was offered by another writing tutor:

Writing tutor interview – extract 10

- 1 Sue: *So, we have a list of criteria but knowing obviously what's in a tutor's head, what these*
- 2 *criteria mean to them, is obviously difficult, but that's life, that's working in a university,*
- 3 *teachers interpret criteria in different ways and different disciplines interpret them in*
- 4 *different ways.* (lines 57-62/III)

Sue explains that *having a list of criteria* is different than *knowing* (line 1) what these criteria mean in specific contexts of a given discipline (lines 3-4) and for particular academic tutors (lines 1-2). Sue does not seem to question that representation, but instead accepts it by saying: *that's life, that's working in a university* (line 2). Her use of markers of evaluation, that is *obviously* (line 1), and *obviously difficult* (line 2), further confirms her commitment to such representation.

Academic tutors in their interviews seemed to display less awareness of the issues indicated by the writing tutors with regard to the disciplinary difference in academic writing requirements. They tended to represent the demands of written assessment as if these were self-evident and unproblematic. Extract 11 gives an example:

Academic tutor interview – extract 11

- 1 Stephen: *...the most important one which is worth twice the amount of the others, so it's*
- 2 *worth 25% in total, is answering the questions with relevance. Then, there's organisation,*
- 3 *use of English academic conventions which means referencing and things like that; use of*
- 4 *sources, that is which sources they have picked, how well are they used in the text,*
- 5 *understanding the material...* (lines 307-312)

In this extract, Stephen with numerical precision explains what he expects from student writing. He lists criteria such as: *relevance* (line 2), *use of sources, that is which sources [students] have picked, how well are they used in the text, understanding the material* (lines 3-4). He presents the criteria as if they were obvious and easily understood. When I asked Stephen to elaborate on some of these points, he explained that these are *just the criteria listed by college* and that they apply to all courses. Instead of offering a more detailed account, Stephen handed to me a copy of feedback sheet (see Figure 5.1) where the criteria are listed. His representation of writing requirements as self-evident was offered with a high degree of commitment, as evidenced in the marker of evaluation *the most important* (line 1). It could be also stated that by him choosing to hand the criteria to me rather than to explain them,

Stephen reinforced his position that the criteria should be easily understandable just from the list and that further explanations may not be needed.

**Figure 5.1 Marking criteria - feedback sheet**

marking criteria	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Satisfactory (C)	Poor (D)	Unsatisfactory (F)
Answering the question fully / Relevance					
Critical analysis					
Clear organisation / structure					
Use of sources					
Understanding the material					
Clarity of expression / grammar / syntax / spelling					
Academic conventions					

Based on the analysis of extracts 9-11, it can be argued that writing tutors tend to be more aware of the differences in requirements in different academic fields and possible issues that this can cause to student-writers. This knowledge appears to come from discussing these requirements with the students (see extract 9) who write for assessment in various academic modules and whose writing is evaluated by tutors affiliated to different disciplinary fields. Academic tutors, however, appear to present the requirements as if they were common sense (Lillis & Turner, 2001) and do not need a more explicit commentary.

### **5.2.2 Model of writing support**

The representations of writing requirements offered in the earlier section (5.2.1) are now augmented by writing and academic tutors' accounts of their perceptions of writing support on the Pre-Masters Programme. This theme deals with sub-themes such as integration of writing support on the PMP, tailoring the support to student's needs, supporting writing through reading of printed materials and of samples of student writing. The sub-themes are presented in turn in the order listed above.

Integration of academic and writing modules

One of the issues related to the model of writing support on the PMP that emerged rather strongly from the interview data referred to the degree of integration between writing support classes and academic writing modules on the Pre-Masters Programme.

Academic tutors seemed to represent the support offered in writing classes as 'useful', 'more general' and 'well-integrated' with academic modules with regard to assisting students in responding to writing requirements. They stressed that a key contribution of writing classes lies in assisting students with language use and 'non-content' academic conventions. Extract 12 illustrates this position:

Academic tutor interview – extract 12

- 1 Stephen: ...*the course is quite integrated, is that that, the things like the non-content*
- 2 *material that I'm judging, are things that have been covered in the [writing] sessions. ... So*
- 3 *I mean obviously one of them is language, one of the criteria is referencing and things like*
- 4 *that, and one of the criteria is organisation and cohesion, and there may be another one as*
- 5 *well, off the top of my head, but I'm not sure, so that's at least three of the seven criteria*
- 6 *which are things that would be covered in the [writing] sessions rather than the SCS.*  
(lines 65-73)

In this extract Stephen states that writing and academic modules are well synchronised (line 1); however, he represents this integration by separating *things like non-content material* (lines 1-2) taught in the writing classes from the disciplinary knowledge covered in the SCS module (line 6). By doing that he portrays issues related to *language* (line 3), *referencing* (line 3), textual *organisation* (line 4), and *cohesion* (line 4) as somehow not directly relevant to how knowledge is written in academic disciplines. As such, Stephen appears to be projecting a view that writing is a technical skill that can be taught in separation from disciplinary knowledge (Wingate, 2006). He describes this support arrangement using a positive evaluative phrase *quite integrated* (line 1), which implies his relative commitment to the current model of writing support. It can be argued, therefore, that by him claiming that the writing classes and academic modules are well-integrated, he in fact sees the separation of provision as a positive and desirable model of writing support. In his representation the only way in which writing classes and academic modules are indeed connected is by written assessment that students who take writing classes have to do for academic modules. Stephen explains that he is *judging* (line 2) students' writing taking into



consideration *things that would be covered in the [writing] sessions rather than the SCS* (line 6).

The representation outlined in relation to Stephen's extract can be additionally strengthened by the fact that two of five academic tutors teaching on the Pre-Masters Programme decided not to participate in my study as they saw issues related to academic writing as not relevant to what they do while teaching their modules.

The representation of integration between writing and academic modules offered by writing support tutors portrays a different view. Writing tutors tend to see some level of limitation of the support offered in writing classes. They do not refer to writing as *non-content material*, and they openly state that they are not familiar with specific requirements that subject tutors may have, and therefore in their teaching they focus on conventions that they believe are quite general and at the same time similar across the disciplines. Extract 13 below provides an example of such representation:

Writing tutor interview – extract 13

- 1 Peter: *I think that's a real... I think that's a weakness. There's collaboration between the*  
2 *writing tutors; we talk, you know, how are we going to get through this, what's worked,*  
3 *what hasn't worked; it's constant collaboration between the four tutors. There are four of*  
4 *us: Tom, Robert, Sue [pseudonyms] and myself, try this, try that, discussion this, discussion*  
5 *that, what works, what doesn't work; all building towards the kind of, the assessed work that*  
6 *they have to do. However, for example the SCS essays, Commerce essays to a certain extent*  
7 *and Law essays as well, I don't know what exactly that teacher is looking for, and I think*  
8 *that's a huge weakness of the course, because I sometimes feel as if we have to kind of teach*  
9 *generic academic writing and hope that the students can kind of tailor their writing towards*  
10 *those specific areas. ... I don't think it's good at all.* (lines 67-79/III)

In this extract, Peter explicitly states that he is not aware of expectations that subject tutors have (line 7) and for that reason he teaches *generic academic writing* conventions (line 9). His representation emphasises some differences between writing and academic tutors. Writing tutors are portrayed as exchanging ideas on preparing students for the assessment requirements (lines 1-6); subject tutors, on the other hand, are portrayed as being absent from that cooperation (lines 6-7). In some ways such representation also reveals the institutional positioning of writing and academic modules as separate from one another. Peter's attitude towards such division is fairly negative, which is indicated by two markers of evaluation: *a real weakness* (line 1), *I don't think it's good at all* (line 10). Interestingly, what emerged from the interview

data, Peter was rather isolated in his position that the lack of cooperation constitutes *a weakness*. Other writing tutors expressed less interest in collaborating with academic tutors. Extract 14 exemplifies that:

Writing tutor interview – extract 14

- 1 Sue: *So, in terms of content tutors knowing, often they're not versed themselves in academic*  
2 *literacy, they're versed in their own subject, so it's often difficult for them to identify the*  
3 *actual needs in terms of literacy of the students. So, I think collaboration is great, in reality*  
4 *it often... we're from different backgrounds, and so we can meet in some areas talking about*  
5 *they need to know how to write a report for example, but the breaking down of that and how*  
6 *that's done I think is very much left to the [writing] tutor. As long as we're aware of what*  
7 *the assignment is and the demands of the assignment, then we work backwards from there.*  
(lines 47-56/III)

Sue represents cooperation between writing and academic tutors as less likely and justifies this representation by pointing to the discrepancy in expertise: subject tutors are *versed in their own subjects* (line 2) and not in *academic literacy* (lines 1-2). In her opinion, academic tutors would not be helpful in *breaking down* (line 5) the requirements of disciplinary writing. She explains that *it's often difficult for [academic tutors] to identify the actual needs in terms of literacy of the students* (lines 2-3). In that sense she indicates that academic tutors have an implicit rather than explicit knowledge of academic writing conventions operating in their respective disciplinary fields. For that reason, Sue expresses the view that this role of writing support is justifiably given to writing tutors rather than academic tutors (line 6) since the former have the necessary writing expertise and once informed about the types of the assignments that students are expected to produce can *work backwards from there* (line 7) and offer suitable assistance. Sue offers her representation of academic tutors lacking the familiarity with writing conventions using such markers of modality and evaluation as an adverb *often* (line 1) and a phrase *it's often difficult* (line 2). She presents her position on possible cooperation with academic tutors by a hypothetical statement which shows her doubts on the feasibility of such arrangement: *collaboration is great, in reality it often* (lines 3-4).

Academic and writing tutors' accounts on the complementarity of support and subject modules offer a similar representation but at the same time reveal different positioning of each group of tutors towards it. Both groups of tutors characterise support offered in writing classes as general. Academic tutors seem to regard such support as sufficient; whereas, writing tutors signal limitations of that model of support. Writing

tutors' representation further indicates that whether this support should be informed by cooperation between writing and academic tutors is a contested issue, or at least one that is hard to reconcile in the present institutional set-up.

This complex representation includes not only the tutors but also, implicitly, the students. It implies that it is down to the students who take the writing classes to somehow use the general support received in writing classes when responding to specific writing requirements in their academic modules. While academic tutors do not express any concern in this regard, writing tutors seem to represent this process as potentially perplexing. Peter, in extract 13, says: *I sometimes feel as if we have to kind of teach generic academic writing and hope that the students can kind of tailor their writing towards those specific areas* (lines 8-10). His statement is rather heavily modalised by a subjective modal marker (*I sometimes feel*), hypothetical modality (*as if*), a low commitment verb (*hope*), and a mitigating phrase (*kind of*). This may indicate that the process, that students have to go through independently, of applying the understandings obtained in the writing classes to writing demands in academic modules may not be straightforward and deprived of challenges.

#### Tailoring the support to students' immediate needs

Responding to students' writing needs constitutes another issue that emerged from the interview data. Here the representations of the support model range from 1) motivated by students' weaknesses and assessment driven, 2) non-existent and highlighting students' own effort, 3) oriented towards meaning making in a given discipline.

Writing tutors' representation emphasises students' deficiencies and the need to eradicate these prior to students' submitting their papers. All of the writing tutors in my sample would say that it is the gaps in students' writing competence that motivate the teaching content in writing classes. Extract 15 illustrates this approach:

Writing tutor interview – extract 15

- 1 Sue: ...they will have a deadline, and for example they'll be still very weak on citation skills,  
2 or still weak on reading and summarising, so it does... it has this term certainly, because of  
3 the amount of assignments, been teaching towards certain styles of writing that are  
4 necessary for the assignment. So, it's almost like a task at the end dictating the syllabus  
5 which is a stronger pull than the actual written down syllabus. There's the hidden syllabus  
6 of this is their deadline, working backwards from there, what do they need to feed into that.  
(lines 107-114/I)

Sue explains that it is because students are *very weak* (line 1) or *still weak* (lines 2) that the writing classes follow *the hidden syllabus* (line 5) of teaching towards a *deadline* (line 1) and including certain styles of writing that *are necessary* (lines 3-4) for students to be able to complete their *assignments* (lines 3 and 4). The outlined representation can be understood as a deficit model of student support (Lea & Street, 1998) which portrays the students as somewhat underachieving and not apt for the writing tasks that they are expected to complete for assessment. Sue's commitment to this representation is rather strong, and it is indicated by a marker of evaluation included in the phrase *stronger pull* (line 5) which is used by Sue while justifying the type of provision described by her in this extract.

Taking into consideration that writing support offered to students is mostly on the level of generic writing skills, as illustrated in the interview data and in classroom observation data (see Chapter 4), it can be argued that writing support appears to cater only indirectly to the needs of student writers. Namely, even though students are seen as lacking the skills required to complete their writing tasks, they are at the same time offered only general writing support and are expected to independently apply what they learnt in the writing classes to their disciplinary writing. This expectation implies that students, perceived as deficient and *very weak* (line 1), are in fact required to demonstrate a rather sophisticated skill of applying general writing rules to specific demands of written assessment given to them in their academic disciplines. The next chapter, in which I present student interview data, will shed more light on this complex issue.

With regard to tailoring the support to the needs of student writers, academic tutors offered a less deficient representation in comparison to writing support tutors. As mentioned earlier, responding to students' needs seems to be addressed by academic tutors in two different ways.

First representation indicates that students' needs are not explicitly addressed in the academic modules, but that regardless of that tutors seem to be aware of students' issues with writing, and they observe a gradual improvement in students' achievement over the course of an academic year. This is illustrated in extract 16:

Academic tutor interview – extract 16

- 1 Stephen: *But many of these students improve amazingly over the course. ...from our point of*
- 2 *view their essays do get better, and it's quite common to have people start giving in their*
- 3 *first essay and getting a C+ and then the last essay gets an A. ... I think we'd say yea, that*
- 4 *student has got a lot better and they've probably put in a lot of hard work, they've thought*
- 5 *about what they're doing.* (lines 288-299)

In this extract, Stephen attributes students' progress to them engaging in writing practice over an extended period of time (line 1) and to their own *hard work* (lines 4-5). It can be inferred that Stephen represents students as responsible for their own progress which, given students' consistent effort, will result in significant improvements in their writing competence. His stance towards this representation is strong and positive, expressed in such markers of evaluation as *amazingly* (line 1), *get better* (line 2), *a lot better* (line 4). It seems, however, that when attributing students' progress to their own commitment, Stephen also projects a certain level of uncertainty and attempts to mitigate his position by using a modal adverb *probably* (line 4) and a subjectively marked statement *I think* (line 3).

A somewhat different representation of dealing with students' needs is offered by Domenico, a Law tutor, in extract 17:

Academic tutor interview – extract 17

- 1 Domenico: *...refer to vocabulary, some useful phrases, yeah, sometimes I use also these*
- 2 *examples, 'OK, in Law you should anyway maybe focus more on this part,' and so on and so*
- 3 *on, these expressions. ... Sometimes it's spontaneous or maybe I'm just discussing and*
- 4 *sometimes we have... I maybe spend quarter of an hour, 20 minutes just on this. ... For*
- 5 *example when we have a revision or we have to ask them to interrupt or ask a question. For*
- 6 *you know another expression that you could use, similar expression to change a little bit or*
- 7 *when you express the same concept, how they've said you to use it in a concept*  
(lines 522-532)

Domenico's representation portrays the tutor (himself) as involved in assisting students in some aspects of academic writing. His main focus is on language use specific to Law. He helps students with: *vocabulary* (line 1), *useful phrases* (line 1), and *expressions* (lines 3 and 6). By explicitly assisting students in developing competence in using these linguistic resources in specific legal context, Domenico

inducts students into ways of meaning making *in Law* (line 2). In his classes this process constitutes an integral, although *spontaneous* (line 3), part of content oriented discussions and is linked to students' consolidating their disciplinary knowledge, for example during *revision* sessions (line 5). As he indicates in this extract, this process is given a relatively good amount of time (line 4). His commitment to the necessity of such support is conveyed through a marker of modality *should* (line 2). The reasons for Domenico's engagement with assisting student writing can be inferred from extract 5, discussed earlier, in which he says that *the use of language is important in Law* and that students should learn how to use *language in a sophisticated way*.

The representations offered by academic tutors resonate with the academic socialisation model of student writing. Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that academic tutors expect students to 'pick up' writing (Lillis, 2006, p. 32) as they become more familiar with a given disciplinary area, as Stephen implies. Furthermore, academic tutors portray the learning of writing as a steady initiation (Lea & Street, 1998) into disciplinary ways of expressing knowledge in a given discipline, as Domenico explains in extract 17.

#### Supporting student writing through reading of sample texts

Another area that emerged from the interview data pertaining to writing support referred to the use of reading in the writing process. Tutors talked about reading in relation to published academic texts, such as journal articles, or with regard to reading samples of other students' work in order to provide models for student writing. I will discuss these two areas in turn:

- Reading academic articles

Reading printed academic texts surfaced as helpful in supporting student writing during the interviews with all of the writing tutors. However, the only academic tutor to refer to reading was Domenico, the Law tutor.

Domenico represented reading as a useful tool that can aid students' understanding of writing conventions in a given discipline. Referring to writing in Law, he portrayed reading as an activity that allows students to familiarise themselves with disciplinary ways of meaning making. Extracts 18 and 19 provide an illustration:

Academic tutor interview – extract 18

- 1 Domenico: *I can also produce them examples from academic articles. You see, for example,*  
2 *we started this in class, this topic in class, see how this professor decided to approach this*  
3 *topic in a critical way, to try to find out which are the main comments on the main advantage*  
4 *of the system and so on, and then we have discussion of these comments.*

(lines 134-139)

Academic tutor interview – extract 19

- 1 Domenico: *For example we go through ... we have discussion, I make example and we go*  
2 *through maybe extracts or I ask questions, raise questions, 'what do you think about this?*  
3 *How can you identify what are the main shortcomings go through the system', but you*  
4 *consider that and so on for each topic. That is interactive and critical discussion. ... Yes,*  
5 *and of course by looking at sources or some extracts from some article to see: 'you see how*  
6 *this author in these extracts decided to deal with this topic', and so on and so on and so on.*

(lines 240-248)

Domenico represents engaging with reading as a way of learning the ways in which knowledge is constructed in a given discipline. He explains that in his teaching he uses examples from *academic articles* (extract 18, line 1) that illustrate *how [a given] professor decided to approach [a given] topic in a critical way* (extract 18, lines 2-3), or *how [a given] author ... decided to deal with [a particular] topic* (extract 19, line 6). He attracts students' attention to aspects of criticality (extract 18, lines 2-3), and to preferred ways of supporting argumentation: *try to find out which are the main comments* (extract 18, line 3). He also teaches students to engage in a reflection on the content rather than just focusing on reading for absorbing the information: *How can you identify which are the main shortcomings* (extract 19, line 3). Finally, Domenico uses reading in class to help students learn how to address certain discipline specific topics: *see how this author in these extracts decided to deal with this topic* (extract 19, lines 5-6). In his portrayal of writing as helpful in learning about the disciplinary meaning making, Domenico does not employ any explicit markers of modalisation or evaluation to convey his commitment to this representation. It can be inferred, however, from his detailed examples that he is strongly committed to the representation of reading as helpful in developing and furthering students' ways of discipline specific knowledge construction.

With regard to the reading of academic texts, writing tutors' representations described reading on two levels: first as a technical skill, and second as engagement with ideas and opinions. Reading as a skill was described in terms of being able to read as *quickly as possible* and finding *the basic idea of the text*. In writing classes students were first practising such reading skills while reading articles taken from newspapers such as The Economist or The Guardian that publish authoritative articles, often supported by

academic and private sector research. Then, the tutors would commonly base their teaching on research articles. Extract 20 below illustrates how such research articles were used:

Writing tutor interview – extract 20

- 1 Peter: *So, we focused on the title and I explained to them that titles are not always that*  
2 *clear; that, for example, is not a very clear title for anyone...but you need to find out what*  
3 *journal it comes from, what's the perspective of the journal, who is the writer, do you know*  
4 *this writer, it might be someone famous, and then use the abstract, go through the abstract.*  
5 *And we talked about what makes a good abstract, and so on, and they were quite surprised*  
6 *that most of the results, if there's an empirical study, is actually there in an abstract, and*  
7 *then they realise, 'This is going to be my friend. If I can go through an abstract quickly I*  
8 *will be able to pick out the main ideas even quicker.'* And I also mention that a lot of them  
9 *use key words as well so there's two of three have key words, so they were very happy about*  
10 *that as well. And then I said, 'Go through the introduction and then go through the*  
11 *conclusion; you don't have to read the rest of it unless you really, really want to.'* And I  
12 *said, 'There's two points to this: one is it might be useful for your topic and it might not be*  
13 *useful for your topic, so you don't have to read it.'* And I think sometimes they think, *'I have*  
14 *to read everything on my reading list.'*... Well no, once you've decided on your topic that  
15 *you're going to write about or that you're interested in an area for research, and focus on*  
16 *that particular thing. (lines 54-75/I)*

In this extract Peter represents reading as a systematically organised process which draws on the familiarity with the structure of a given text and ability to position the text within a certain publishing context. Peter points at such textual elements as *title* (line 1), *abstract* (lines 4-8), *key words* (line 9), *introduction* and *conclusion* (line 10 and 11) that will guide the students' judgement as to whether a given article is going to be *useful* (line 13) for their writing. Students should also base their judgement on information related to publishing details: *what journal it comes from, what's the perspective of the journal, who is the writer* (lines 2-3). In other words, Peter's representation portrays reading as way of finding the information that may help students to *focus on the particular thing* (line 15-16) that they are trying to write about. Peter's position on desirability of such representation is revealed through the modal verb *need to* (line 2), and his use of directives: *use* (line 4), *go* (line 10), and *focus* (line 15).

Peter's account can be also interpreted, to some degree, as representing reading on the level of engagement with ideas. Specifically, Peter refers to some of the elements of reading mentioned earlier by the Law tutor in extracts 18 and 19. Peter alludes to reading as a process oriented towards *picking out the main ideas* (line 8) and as a process that rather than being directed toward accumulating knowledge requires a



great deal of reflection and ability to be selective: *sometimes they think, 'I have to read everything on my reading list.'*...Well no, once you've decided on your topic that you're going to write about or that you're interested in an area for research, and focus on that particular thing (lines 13-16). Such representation, which focuses on deeper understanding was also endorsed by other writing tutors. In the interviews, I would inquire whether the articles used for this type of reading practice would be taken from students' academic fields. Extract 21 below sheds some light on that:

Writing tutor interview – extract 21

- 1 Sue: *Well not specialist, no, because I don't think that's fair. I don't know, I don't have*
- 2 *specialist knowledge of the fields, so they would be reading beyond my knowledge, of Law*
- 3 *for example, so I certainly wouldn't choose... but I would choose topics, usually Social*
- 4 *Science that kind of overlap... Social or Occupational Science that overlaps between them,*
- 5 *that they can all have an understanding of and bring their knowledge to bear on. It's not*
- 6 *specialist within their field but the language will be repeated, and also their background*
- 7 *knowledge will have different perspectives on what they're doing and what they're reading,*
- 8 *hopefully.* (lines 114-122/II)

Sue in this extract, similarly to other writing tutors in their interviews, explains that the texts used in the writing classes were taken from a broadly understood field of *Social Science* (lines 3-4). This is motivated by the fact that students in her writing class are affiliated to a variety of academic *fields* (line 2) one of them being *Law for example* (lines 2-3), and that Sue does not have expertise to discuss articles from students' respective disciplines: *they would be reading beyond my knowledge* (line 2). Regardless of the somewhat generic nature of the texts, Sue portrays the engagement with reading as oriented towards developing *different perspectives* (line 7) with regard to the content of a given article, drawing on students' *understanding* (line 5) as well as *their background knowledge* (lines 6-7). Moreover, Sue's representation includes emphasis on *the language* (line 6) used in a given text as by reading students can expand their linguistic resources which are common in Social Science disciplines (lines 5-8). Sue conveys her representation with a great deal of commitment revealed in such modalised verbs as *would* (line 3), *will* (lines 6 and 7) and an adverb *certainly* (line 3). The representation offered by Sue resonates, to some degree, with the portrayal of reading given by the Law tutor as well as with the example from Peter's writing class discussed in the preceding chapter (see Section 4.2.3).

As illustrated in the above discussions, reading seems to play an important part in developing student writing and in offering writing support. In the Academic Literacies

literature on writing support, reading has not been given much attention. Recently Wingate et al (2011) and Hardy and Clughen (2012) included reading into their research on student writing. They did not, however, reported on how reading supports writing. I will further explore this theme when discussing student interview data (see Chapter 6) and students' responses to essay questions (see Chapter 7).

▫ Reading samples of student writing

In addition to focusing on the reading of published academic texts, tutors in my interview data also indicated that engaging with close reading of samples of writing produced by other students constitutes a helpful pedagogic tool while offering writing support. This sub-theme, however, emerged only from the interviews with the writing tutors. The writing tutors indicated that over a period of time they developed their own corpora of ethnographically collected samples of student writing (Belcher, 2006), usually from their former students. Extracts 22 and 23 illustrate how these samples of student writing are used in the writing classroom:

Writing tutor interview – extract 22

1 Peter: *So I like to show models, I work a lot with text so students can actually see how things*  
2 *are done in a natural environment or an authentic environment, and I like to show student*  
3 *work as well because I think students sometimes feel a little bit distant from academic*  
4 *journals or academic texts because they feel, 'Well I can't get to that level just yet.' So I like*  
5 *to show them student work because they can think, 'Okay, well I can do that,' or I can*  
6 *understand what the student's trying to do. Also with student texts... and the difference*  
7 *between academic texts and student texts is that invariably student texts are answering the*  
8 *question that our students will have to answer as well, and academic text is good to show*  
9 *features, vocabulary and so on and so forth, but sometimes students just want to see, 'Okay,*  
10 *right, how do I answer this question, how do I do a critique, how do I write an opinion based*  
11 *essay, how do I do...' and so on and so forth. And so I think that's quite useful for the*  
12 *students to do that. (lines 83-96/II)*

Peter represents using student writing as *models* (line 1) of what is expected from students in academic assessment. He points to the use of students' text as helpful in illustrating writing conventions in *a natural or an authentic environment* (line 2). His representation portrays samples of student work as a more accessible example of academic writing than journal articles: *students sometimes feel a little bit distant from academic journals* (lines 3-4). In other words, Peter implies that students find it difficult to relate to *that level* (line 4) of writing as illustrated in journal articles. He specifies that the value of academic journal articles lies in helping students to understand some textual features and expand their academic language use: *academic text is good to show features, vocabulary* (lines 8-9). However, Peter portrays samples

of student writing as more relevant to assisting students in developing understanding of what the requirements of written assessment are. Peter explains that *models* (line 1) help students *see* (line 9) how to *answer* a specific essay *question* (line 10), how to *do a critique* (line 10), or how to write *an opinion based essay* (lines 10-11). Peter shows his commitment to this representation by the use of evaluative verbs: *I like* (lines 1, 2, 4), and by an evaluative statement: *that's quite useful* (line 11). He offers this representation with subjectively modalised phrase *I think* (line 3), which is used in relation to journal articles. This may imply that his view of academic articles as being less useful in teaching than models of student writing is drawn from his own teaching experience.

Peter further indicated that working with models is a useful pedagogic technique that builds on students' reflective reading rather than simply offering templates that students can afterwards imitate in their own writing:

Writing tutor interview – extract 23

- 1 Peter: *I use a lot of student writing, former student writing. I show relatively good and*
- 2 *relatively not so good papers and we ask students to go through them, discuss them, critique*
- 3 *them and so on and so forth. And, you know, hopefully by the end of the first term students*
- 4 *are in a position where they are able to discuss, understand and work with, you know,*
- 5 *writing terms, academic writing terms such as a thesis statement, such as an overview, such*
- 6 *as, you know, how to incorporate references and so on.* (lines 345-351/I)

Using samples of *former student writing* (line 1) is represented as an activity that is based on reading *relatively good and relatively not so good papers* (lines 1-2) and that involves dialogue with other students (line 2) and critical reflection (lines 2-3). It is aimed at bringing students to *a position where they are able to [independently] discuss* (line 4) the writing models and build an informed understanding of what makes *a thesis statement* (line 5), how to write *an overview* (line 5), or how to *incorporate references* (line 6) into a text. Peter's positive attitude towards such engagement with teaching and learning writing is expressed through the positive evaluation marker *hopefully* (line 3).

Similar uses of samples of student writing were reported by the other three writing tutors. Writing sessions analysed in the preceding chapter illustrate how student work is used in the teaching practice (see for example a session with Sue in Section 4.2.2, and sessions with Peter in Section 4.2.3). Academic tutors did not report using models of student writing in their teaching. Experience suggests (N. Lloyd<sup>15</sup>, personal communication, 20 January 2014) that academic tutors tend to show more caution with showing their students some samples of other students' work. They perceive this as having a possible impact on students' independent work. Research on Academic Literacies, however, indicates that students value the opportunity of critically engaging with models of student writing and that, indeed, they view other students' texts as more constructive than published academic articles. For example, Wingate (2012a) reports that 'expert writing [is] perceived [by students] as intimidating because of the high standards it sets, students essays [give] a more realistic picture of what is expected' (p. 30).

### **5.3 Summary of findings**

This chapter presented an analysis and discussion of the interview data with academic and writing tutors. The chapter was organised around two key themes: 'writing requirements' and 'model of writing support' and associated with them sub-themes. Bringing together the perspectives of both writing and academic tutors under the same analytical categories allowed for a discussion which emphasised the similarities and differences in perspectives taken by the respective tutors.

As far as the first theme - writing requirements – is concerned, the findings indicate that academic tutors are less aware of the epistemological underpinnings of writing conventions (Lea & Street, 1998) and tend to articulate them using the same general descriptors as the writing tutors do. Both academic and writing tutors emphasise the importance of textual structure, language use and engagement with ideas as key components of the demands of academic writing. What constitutes 'specific disciplinary requirements', however, has not transpired from the analysis. This can be due to the fact that academic tutors are not able to articulate what the specific requirements are, and the writing tutors are, as they state in the interview data, not

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<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Lloyd is a programme convenor for writing support in Law at one of London universities.

familiar with them. Additionally, it also emerges from the data that writing tutors are particularly cautious with regard to any 'content' teaching being done in the writing classes. They explain that it is not their role to teach 'content'; however, it seems from the data that the distinction between 'content teaching' and the teaching of 'discipline specific conventions' is somewhat blurred and insufficiently conceptualised.

As far as the second theme - model of writing support - is concerned the differences between writing and academic tutors' perspectives are more distinctive. The academic tutors regard academic writing as 'non-content material' which is not relevant to their 'content teaching', and therefore they see writing support as offered on the PMP as sufficient. The writing tutors, on the other hand, question such support provision. Writing tutors express some level of dissatisfaction with offering only generic support as they recognise that students are required to respond to more specific requirements of writing in academic modules. The writing tutors' perspective, which emerged from the interview data, confirms the generic model of support reported on the basis of the classroom observation data offered in Chapter 4. The findings also indicate that writing support gives some focus to reading, however, more as a source of information than engagement with disciplinary ways of knowing. One more aspect that surfaced, yet only with regard to writing tutors, was the use of samples of student writing for the purpose of writing instruction.

The next chapter focuses on student interview data and will discuss how students view issues related to writing requirements, student writing support as well as how they approach the task of responding to disciplinary demands of assessment. The chapter offers insights into the extent to which students view general writing support as useful in the preparation for the disciplinary writing and whether they are able (or not) to move to an understanding of writing on the level of subject specificity and knowledge construction.

## Chapter 6 - Students' perceptions of assignment writing

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter lies at the cusp of my thesis as having analysed writing support offered in writing classes (Chapter 4) and perspectives of both writing and academic tutors on writing requirements and writing support (Chapter 5), I now turn my attention to exploring students' accounts of assignment writing: both their understanding of academic writing requirements and of their attempts to answer the demands of written assessment in their academic modules<sup>16</sup>. Earlier chapters have shown that writing support offered to students on the Pre-Masters Programme remains mainly on the general level of textual features of an essay, with some focus given to language use and rhetorical elements of writing. My aim in this chapter is to explore students' understanding of the writing requirements and the ways in which they approach the task of writing and meeting the assessment requirements in their academic modules. As such my discussion in this chapter seeks to address the following research question: *How do students understand writing requirements, and what assists them in responding to writing requirements in their academic modules?*

In my investigation I draw on student interview data with 13 students enrolled on the Pre-Masters Programme (see Chapter 3 for a detailed account on research participants and data collection). My interviews with the students were semi-structured and focused on engaging with the students in a 'talk-around-assignment-writing' (Lillis, 2001; see also Section 3.3.2). The analysis of the interviews follows the same procedures as those applied to the tutor interview data (detailed in Section 3.4.2 and summarised in Section 5.1). I started my analytical work by conducting a thematic analysis in order to establish themes and sub-themes that capture issues related to students' understanding of what is involved in assignment writing while responding to assessment demands of end of term essays in their subject modules. Once that had been achieved, I then worked with the concept of *representational meaning* (Fairclough, 2003) to better understand students' discoursal representations of

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<sup>16</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was published as a book chapter: Górska, W. (2012). Ways with writing. In S. Sovic & M. Blythman (Eds.), *International Students Negotiating Higher Education: Critical Perspectives*. Oxon/New York: Routledge.

concerns related to assignment writing. Wherever appropriate, I engaged in a closer analysis using tools such as *markers of modalisation* and *evaluation* (Fairclough, 2003) as I found them particularly helpful in exploring speaker commitment to the representations offered in spoken discourse. Similarly to my other data chapters, in my understanding of issues arising from the analysis, I am guided by a theoretical perspective grounded in the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998) and Street's (2009) account of 'hidden features' in student writing.

This chapter is organised thematically to reflect the key points that arose from the interview data. The following section (6.2) offers an overview of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of interview data, and as such begins the discussion of discursal representations of students' understanding of and responding to writing requirements. The chapter then moves on to presenting the first theme 'understanding of writing requirements' and associated with it sub-themes (Section 6.2.1). Afterwards, the second theme 'responding to writing requirements' and relevant sub-themes are presented (Section 6.2.2). The chapter ends with a summary of findings (Section 6.3).

## **6.2 Discursal representations of students' understanding of and responding to writing requirements**

As explained in the methodology chapter (see Section 3.3.2), my interviews with students were cyclical and were recorded over a period of one academic year: I met with each of the student participants three times, towards the end of each academic term. This recurring nature of my conversations with student participants helped me to develop a holistic understanding of students' perceptions (Lillis, 2008) as based in their experience over the entire time of their enrolment on the PMP. Having engaged in the thematic analysis of the data, I arrived at the overarching themes and sub-themes<sup>17</sup> set out in Table 6.1:

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<sup>17</sup> As my interview data collection with the students resulted in a total of over 27 hours of recording (see Section 3.3.2), and as my student participants were second language users of English other themes were also noted in the process of data analysis. However, as my thesis is not concerned with issues related to supporting second language writers and due to the limitation of space, these themes will not be explored in this thesis.

**Table 6.1 Themes and sub-themes: students' interviews**

<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Understanding of writing requirements</b>
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Having a clear structure</li> <li>▪ Answering the question and guiding the reader</li> <li>▪ Providing support for ideas and being critical</li> <li>▪ Using 'academic language'</li> <li>▪ Writing requirements in different academic modules</li> <li>▪ Support in understanding writing requirements</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Responding to writing requirements</b>
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Choosing a topic</li> <li>▪ Reading</li> <li>▪ Preparing drafts</li> <li>▪ Peer-reviewing and networking</li> </ul>

The interview data, which will be discussed in detail below, suggests that the students approach assignments with a multifaceted understanding of what the requirements entail. Their accounts include textual and language features, such as clear structure and academic language, but they also include a more rhetorical focus on issues related to engagement with ideas, criticality, task fulfilment and readership. Additionally, students show awareness of divergent writing demands in various academic modules and they articulate some issues related to general writing support.

With regard to responding to the writing requirements, the interviewees reveal that writing itself constitutes only a part of a complex intellectual process. Students indicated that much of their effort and attention is directed towards engagement with a given subject content through steps taken in selecting the topic, extensive reading and discussing ideas with networks of friends.

### **6.2.1 Understanding of writing requirements**

This section presents six sub-themes related to writing requirements. The section offers students' representations of how they understand writing requirements and to what extent their understandings draw on the teaching provision on the PMP.

#### *Having a clear structure*

When asked about writing requirements, students would usually start their response by pointing to text structure as one of the principal elements of what is expected from them in academic writing: *you have to have structure, that's the most important thing* (Milena 19-20/III). All the students in my data represent the structure as consisting of



*a beginning, middle and end* (Luana 125/I) referring to textual features of introduction, body and conclusion. They would usually represent these structural elements as *some kind of rule that you have to follow* (Natasha 145/III) while writing. Extract 1 below offers a more detailed illustration this representation:

Student interview – extract 1

- 1 Milena: *It's rigid, it's introduction, then body and paragraph the same as TOEFL. You need*  
2 *to put in your introduction, your thesis, so your idea, main idea and then points that you will*  
3 *try... the principal points, each of the... the other paragraphs... in one paragraph you need*  
4 *to explain the first point, one two, and then it's... I think it's... if you learn the structure, you*  
5 *got it. ... And, in the conclusion you need to put your introduction and say, okay, that's why*  
6 *I say... da-da-da.... I think it's easy to grasp, yeah, you understand the structure, you can.*  
(lines 190-200/I)

In the extract above the structure is presented as consisting of an *introduction*, then *body* (line 1) and a *conclusion* (line 5). In this representation, each of the elements of the structure has a particular rhetorical function. Namely, the introduction needs to include writer's *thesis* (line 2) or in other words *main idea* (line 2), and it should also indicate *the principal points* (line 3) that the text will develop. Then, each of the body paragraphs explores these points in more detail, for example *in one paragraph you need to explain the first point* (lines 3-4), and so on. Finally, the conclusion somewhat recaptures issues signalled in the introduction: *in the conclusion you need to put your introduction* (line 5). This representation portrays text structure on the level of rhetorical features and implies that the structure is inflexible and therefore cannot be changed or varied: *it's rigid* (line 1). At the same time, the structure is described as *easy to grasp* (line 6) and highly possible to be learnt without difficulty: *you understand the structure, you can* (line 6). Furthermore, in extract 1 Milena indicates that becoming familiar with this structural pattern is relatively important to students' ability to respond to academic writing requirements: *if you learn the structure, you got it* (lines 4-5).

In her second interview, Milena summarises this representation by saying that, *Academic writing is structured. I think I never really get a bad mark if I follow the structure and the structure is clear* (304-306/II). Here, she also points to a link between the achievement in academic writing and her ability to produce *structured* prose: she attributes her good grades to her being able to reconstruct the textual pattern with precision and clarity.

In my student interview data, familiarity with textual features is portrayed as necessary to address writing requirements. When talking about the textual pattern as constituting an element of writing requirements, students use markers of modalisation expressed through such modal verbs as *have to* (Milena 19-20/III; Natasha 145/III), *need to* (extract 1 - lines 1, 3, 5). This representation is further strengthened by markers of evaluation such as the use of an adverb in a superlative degree: *most important* (Milena 19-20/III), indicating that structural features are essential for fulfilling writing requirements. Subsequently, success in writing as attributed to students' familiarity with the text structure is expressed with similar level of commitment. In extract 1, for example, there is a marker of modalisation expressed in a non-hypothetical conditional statement *if you learn the structure, you got it* (lines 4-5), which denotes high desirability for students to become familiar with structural features of text (Fairclough, 2003). Similarly, Milena's statement *I never really get a bad mark if I follow the structure and the structure is clear* (304-306/II) includes a non-hypothetical statement, a marker of modality *never* (adverb of usuality) and a marker of evaluation *really* (adverb). All this suggests that this level of text structure is recognised by students as being of much importance in academic writing.

The textual structure that students presented as essential in responding to writing requirements is associated with the 'study skills' approach (Lea & Street, 1998). Even though literature describes this approach as reductive with 'severe limitations' (Wingate, 2006, p. 457), the students' representations of structural features as *the most important thing* in writing requirements seem to suggest that they view at least some elements of the 'study skills' approach as helpful in developing 'a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158). I will take up this point later in my discussion chapter.

Some of my student interviewees (7 out of 13) indicated that they extend these structural features representation of writing by linking them with clarity in expression of ideas and with the notion of audience. Extract 2 offers an example:

Student interview – extract 2

- 1 David: *Some ideas get lost because the structure is not clear* (line 186/II). *If the structure is*
- 2 *not clear, then you make it confusing. So, firstly the basic requirement is to make the*
- 3 *structure clear and make every paragraph clear. I make every paragraph clearer, topic*
- 4 *sentence, topic sentence. That guarantees [that] the reader can understand what I want to*
- 5 *say.* (lines 396-399/II)

Extract 2 portrays text structure as a systematic way of presenting ideas. Specifically, the quote seems to indicate that if *the structure is not clear* (lines 1-2), the ideas may not be understood as intended by the writer: *some ideas get lost* (line 1), and the presented discussion may come across as *confusing* (line 2). This proposition is conveyed by the use of non-hypothetical statement: *if the structure is not clear, then you make it confusing* (lines 1-2), which signals strong commitment on the part of the speaker (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168). Clarity of structure is described as *the basic requirement* (line 2). Here the adjective *basic* has the role of a discourse-relative marker of evaluation indicating that clear structure is a foundation of academic writing. This need for clarity is further represented as essential in all parts of the text: *make every paragraph clear* (line 3). The way to achieve this precision of expression is by starting each paragraph with a *topic sentence* (lines 3-4). This representation is then linked with the notion of audience and with the establishing of a writer-reader relationship: it is the clear structure that *guarantees* (line 4) that readers can comprehend the meaning intended by the writer. Here the verb *guarantee* is a marker of evaluation pointing to 'assumed values' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 173) and indicating that a well-developed structure is a desired element of writing as it assists readers' comprehension.

It can be inferred from this account that by linking elements of textual structure to the clarity of the presentation of ideas and to the writer-reader relationship, students make a connection between structural text features and more 'hidden features' such as signalling the writer's intention and audience awareness. These features point to the need for signposting key points and helping the reader to 'track the development of argument' (Street, 2009, p. 13) in the text. I will refer to this further in the next section.

Answering the question and guiding the reader

When discussing writing requirements, my interviewees indicated as important the need to answer the essay question and to guide the readers through their suggested answer. Students would often represent the answer to a given essay question in terms of taking a position and showing understanding of a given topic: *You have to find the angle and express your position. It's your understanding of the question title* (Nicole 72-73/III). In this statement the use of the modality marker 'have to' implies that presenting the writer's position is viewed by students as a necessary requirement of academic writing. The interview data further suggests that the position taken by the writer is a starting point for the discussion and provides a backbone for the essay structure as illustrated in extract 3:

Student interview – extract 3

- 1 Nicole: *In the introduction we have to indicate our position of our essay, something like*
- 2 *'This paper will examine, will focus on which aspect'. Then, like show the reader the order*
- 3 *in our main body.* (lines 219-222/I)

Extract 3 specifies that it is advisable that the author's position be indicated at the start of the essay *in the introduction* (line 1). The use of the modal marker *have to* (line 1) explicitly marks that as necessary. The extract also indicates that the author's position should be communicated overtly, for example by writing *this paper will examine* (line 2). Such a way of presenting the author's position is portrayed as having a role in establishing a writer-reader relationship and guiding the reader through the text: *show the reader the order in our main body* (lines 2-3). The need to establish that relationship is expressed with an imperative clause *show the reader* (line 2), which indicates high speaker commitment to this proposition (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168). This representation is recounted in more detail in extract 4 below:

Student interview – extract 4

- 1 Milena: *And the structure is basically your main idea, your answer, and then show to who's*
- 2 *reading your piece of paper, show your path, your way: 'I'm going to talk about this and*
- 3 *this and this in order to answer this question and have to talk about this, this and this, and*
- 4 *then just follow the steps'. You have to talk about your four or three or five ideas and then*
- 5 *have a conclusion. And the conclusion is okay, for all these reasons I agree or disagree or I*
- 6 *think that this and this and this...* (lines 25-31/III)

Similarly to extract 3, in extract 4 the answer to the essay question is represented as a reasoning that helps to develop the text structure: *the structure is basically your main idea, your answer* (line 1). The use of an evaluation marker expressed through the

adverb *basically* signals that the text structure is fundamentally important in developing an answer to the essay question. The extract also indicates that the answer to the essay question is to be signalled early in the text (lines 2-4), systematically developed in the body sections (line 4) and ended by *a conclusion* (line 5), which summarises the author's position on a given topic, e.g. *for all these reasons I agree or disagree* (line 5). The speaker's strong commitment to this representation is revealed through the use of the modality marker *have to* (line 4). Extract 4 also emphasises the need to ascertain that the audience reading a given paper will be able to follow the text: *show to who's reading your piece of paper, show your path, show your way* (lines 1-2). This is expressed using imperative statements thereby strongly indicating the importance of the proposition (Fairclough, 2003). The signalling to the reader needs to be done explicitly by stating what the author *is going to talk about* in the text (line 2).

The analytical accounts in this section show that students view text structure as more than just a framework detached from the process of meaning making. They emphasise the importance of signalling text development and assisting the audience in following the students' answer. Therefore, it can be said that students reveal an understanding of writing on the level of 'hidden features' such as 'signalling' and 'audience' (Street, 2009, p. 13). Students' accounts seem to indicate, therefore, that even though they receive writing support in general writing classes, the students do not regard writing as a simply technical skill, but rather, they view writing as a means of mediating meaning and communicating their ideas to target disciplinary audiences.

#### Providing support for ideas and being critical

Describing writing requirements, my participants emphasised the importance of substantiating the ideas included in the text with adequate support and making sure that the offered discussion displays criticality. They recognise that providing support for ideas constitutes one of the key writing requirements. As academic writing is *opinion based* (Natasha 396/II), students acknowledge that they *have to support [their] ideas every time* (Natasha 121/I). Extract 5 below illustrates this representation:

Student interview – extract 5

- 1 Milena: *I think, you can have your own way to think but you have to hold your way of*
- 2 *thinking with other people, with authors, with books, with societies, the references, so you*
- 3 *have to answer the question with your knowledge but your knowledge is filled with many*
- 4 *other knowledges so you have to put this in your paper.* (lines 32-36/III)

In this extract support for ideas is represented in terms of referring to academic sources as a way of justifying one's point of view: *your knowledge is filled with many other knowledges* (lines 3-4). Extract 5 specifies that a student-writer's way of thinking (lines 1-2) needs to take account of positions represented by *other people, authors, books, societies* and in general by *the references* (line 2).

The data further suggests that students' ability to substantiate their opinions with reference to literature is of high importance to fulfilling writing requirements. This can be inferred from the use of the modal verb *have to* (Natasha 121/I, extract 5 lines 1, 3, and 4) and the use of an expression of usuality *every time* (Natasha 121/I) when describing the use of sources. The fact that references are desirable in academic writing can also be deduced from the use of the verb *support* (Natasha 121/I) as a marker of evaluation (see 'assumed values' in Fairclough, 2003, p. 173) indicating that students' ideas are of more value when grounded in academic literature.

When discussing the use of sources as a way of supporting their ideas, students often linked the support for ideas with criticality. In their accounts, they represented criticality as a skill of finding and justifying differences in opinions. This is illustrated in extract 6:

Student interview – extract 6

- 1 Sarah: *It's hard to tell and it's hard to do it. I say that's okay my essay is quite critical*
- 2 *already but when I submit, teacher, "We require...can you be more critical in your essay?"*
- 3 *I think critical is something develop your own skill rather than describe something but you*
- 4 *need to compare and contrast advantages or disadvantages and, okay, some other said this*
- 5 *whereas the other said this, so have something compare I think.* (lines 43-48/III)

Criticality is represented here as the ability to provide an account that is comparative in nature and that takes into consideration both similarities and differences: *you need to compare and contrast advantages or disadvantages* (lines 3-4) and examines a given phenomenon considering opinions expressed by a variety of authors: *some other said this whereas the other said this* (lines 4-5). This understanding of criticality is presented with strong speaker commitment expressed by the use of the modal verb

*need to* (line 4). At the same time, criticality is represented in opposition to plain description: *critical is something develop your own skill rather than describe something* (line 3). Such representation, however, is offered with a lesser degree of commitment as the statement is opened with subjectively marked by the phrase *I think* (line 3). Additionally, this extract portrays criticality as being challenging and difficult for students to achieve: *it's hard to do it* (line 1).

#### Using 'academic language'

Another aspect of writing requirements raised by my interviewees was the use of academic language: both in terms of language structure and vocabulary. All of the students raised the issue of use of language in academic writing referring to the formality of expression: *just write everything in a formal way* (Nicole 137/II). Here the adjective *formal* can be seen as a discourse-relative marker of evaluation (Fairclough, 2003, p. 172) which signals that using formal language is desirable in academic writing. Within this broad representation, there are three aspects that can be inferred from the data. First, there is the representation of language use on the surface level, then the representation of language as a tool that helps to signal relationships between the ideas and therefore makes the text *understandable to the reader* (Milena 80-82/II), and finally there is the representation of language on the level of vocabulary characteristic of a given topic or a discipline. I will discuss these three aspects below.

Surface features of language use that students referred to were often characterised with reference to correctness and appropriateness of language forms. Extract 7 and 8 below give examples of such representation:

#### Student interview – extract 7

- 1 Milena: *Good grammar. I don't know if this is a good strategy but I memorise some useful*
- 2 *phrases like 'it will be seen that' for example or 'as a consequence' and memorise this kind*
- 3 *of useful phrases, so it's really important in my academic writing. 'Focus on'. 'To sum up'.*  
(lines 305-308/II)

#### Student interview – extract 8

- 1 Nicole: *...to be more specific, maybe the sentence structure and some like academical*
- 2 *vocabulary, like a reporting vocabulary: 'indicate' - something like this. And we can't use*
- 3 *'I' in our academic essays; just use 'this paper' or 'this essay' to replace the 'I', and avoid*
- 4 *the first [personal pronoun]... (lines 26-29/III)*

In these two short extracts the language use is represented with regard to surface features such as students' ability to use *good grammar* (extract 7, line 1), *useful phrases* (extract 7, lines 1-2), *sentence structure and ... academical vocabulary* (extract 8, lines 1-2). The students illustrate such representation by offering *memorised* examples: *it will be seen that, as a consequence or focus on, to sum up* (extract 7, lines 2-3), *indicate* (extract 8, line 2). In extract 8, there is also an example which illustrates some rules of formality in academic writing, i.e. the use of impersonal expressions such as *this paper, this essay* (line 3) instead of using the first personal pronoun '*I*' (line 3).

Speaker commitment to this representation of language use seems varied. There are instances in which surface features are portrayed as desirable, for example in evaluative statements: *useful phrases* (extract 7, lines 1-2 and 3), *it's really important* (extract 7, line 3), and modality markers: a modal verb *can't* (extract 8, line 2) and imperatives *use* and *avoid* (extract 8, line 3). However, there are also instances in which surface features representation of language use is portrayed with lesser commitment such as through a subjectively marked statement *I don't know if this is a good strategy* (extract 7, line 1), a hedging phrase *kind of* (extract 7, lines 2-3), and an adverb *maybe* (extract 8, line 1).

As mentioned earlier, apart from the surface level features, students' representations of language use also included the use of language as a tool employed to signal the development of ideas. This representation is illustrated in extract 9 below:

Student interview – extract 9

- 1 Sophia: *And vocabulary ... the tools to write in an academic way because I didn't ... have*
- 2 *these words like 'nevertheless', 'furthermore', 'and so...', never. So, when I wrote my*
- 3 *application for this course [Pre-Masters Programme], I used to write sentence-support, then*
- 4 *for example, I don't know, 'I want to study here because I'm interested in Philosophy. I used*
- 5 *to work as an assistant to...' I never used connective words. It was just sentence, sentence,*
- 6 *sentence, sentence, sentence. Imagine! ... I have advanced in cohesion, in coherence, you*
- 7 *know, that sort of things, and having more vocabulary, different vocabulary.*

(lines 452-463/II)

Here language is portrayed as a tool useful in emphasising the meaning intended by the writer with regard to the relationship between ideas. Specifically, Sophia in extract 9 gives examples of vocabulary such as *nevertheless* and *furthermore* (line 2) which she calls *connective words* (line 5) that are helpful in indicating the relationships between ideas. She refers to this type of language use as *cohesion* and *coherence* (line



6) as it is helpful in signalling the links between the ideas. In this extract the student's ability to use language to connect ideas is described as *an academic way* (line 1), which is expressed using a discourse-relative marker of evaluation (Fairclough, 2003, p. 172) and which signals that the use of linking words and expressions is desirable in student writing. This representation is strengthened by another evaluative statement, an ellipted exclamation: *Imagine [that I never used connective words]!* (line 6), which emphasises that the use of *connective words* is of high importance to student writing.

Students often mentioned that the use of linking words is useful in assisting readers' in their understanding of the text: *other people need guidelines or linking words to show what I'm doing in this paragraph* (Alice 75/III). Here, as in other extracts (e.g., student interview – extracts 2, 3, and 4 discussed earlier) this representation is offered with a high degree of speaker commitment expressed through the use of the modal verb *need*.

Finally, when discussing writing requirements, my interviewees mentioned language as helpful in conveying concepts characteristic of a given topic of a given academic field. This representation is illustrated in examples 10 and 11 below:

Student interview – extract 10

- 1 Sophia: ...*every subject has a specific vocabulary, so when I talk about religion I discover a*
- 2 *certain type of vocabulary, when I talk about Darwin I discover another type of vocabulary.*  
(lines 73-75/III)

Here language use is represented with regard to words that are distinctive to a particular topic: Sophia mentions *specific vocabulary* (line 1). Her use of the adjective *specific* in this context, as a discourse-relative marker of evaluation (Fairclough, 2003), implies that particular subjects require a given repertoire of vocabulary. She gives an example that issues related to religion would be written about with different words than those used in texts related to evolution. She talks about *certain types of vocabulary* as adequate for each of the topic areas (line 2).

Student interview – extract 11

- 1 Sarah: *Sometimes from one word we cannot just change and find something different; we*
- 2 *have to stick to that word, it's a legal term... You cannot change the word, the verb*
- 3 *'foresee', you cannot change 'foresee' to 'predict' or other synonym. You just use 'foresee'*
- 4 *because it's a legal term. Even though some word is similar meaning, you cannot use that.*  
(lines 166-167.180-184/II)

Extract 11 offers a slightly different representation as it highlights terms characteristic of a given discipline. Here, Sarah gives examples from legal studies. She explains that certain words cannot be replaced by a *synonym* (line 3) as they denote a particular *legal term* (line 2), and therefore need to be used adhering to one form. For example, the verb *foresee* cannot be replaced by *predict* (line 3) as this would change the intended meaning. In this extract speaker commitment is represented by a repeated marker of modality: a negative form of a modal verb 'can': *cannot* (lines 1, 2, and 4). This adds strength to the offered representation, and further indicates that language is a tool of meaning making in given disciplines.

Similar issues to those discussed with regard to extract 11 were raised by students taking the Commerce Administration module. They would frequently say that *business language or business terms* (Alice 289/I) are not to be substituted by other words even though they might be similar in meaning.

The analytical accounts presented above give evidence that students see language on the level of surface features (extracts 7 and 8) but also as a tool that helps to guide the readers through the texts (extract 9) and that helps to convey meaning characteristic of a given topic and of a given discipline (extracts 10 and 11). When students discuss surface features their speaker commitment, as illustrated in the cited extracts, seems to be lesser; however, when discussing language as a meaning making tool their commitment seems to increase. This may indicate that students see language use in writing more in line with approaches that take into account disciplinary context, like Academic Literacies or Academic Socialisation (Lea & Street, 1998), and less in line with a generic approach to writing as in the 'study skills' model.

#### Writing requirements in different academic modules

My data indicates that students' understanding of writing requirements includes issues related to differences in tutor expectations across the academic modules. In the interview data majority of the students (11 out of 13) point at differences in requirements and represent these differences in writing across academic modules in terms of different engagement with ideas and in terms of the requirement to produce different types of text. I will discuss these two representations in more details below.

Students typically said that the compulsory module in Socio-Cultural Studies requires from them a more personal engagement based on their own reflections. Other modules, such as Global Politics, European Law or Commerce Administration require a discussion based on more specific information related to a given subject content. Extract 12 below gives an example of such representation:

Student interview – extract 12

- 1 Natasha: *When we are taking some module, for instance Global Politics, I have to follow this*
- 2 *rule, I have to have these facts, you know, but for SCS you are more open to have your*
- 3 *opinions because maybe you agree or disagree with some ... there is no rules, you know,*
- 4 *there is your perception about something. But in Global Politics you can't say that there is*
- 5 *that European Union is for instance multicultural or institutional maybe, you have to be*
- 6 *more... how to say, more correct, and more specific in this area if you want to of course*
- 7 *good score.* (lines 83-90/III)

In this extract writing for SCS is portrayed in terms of students having to display their own perspective: *perception about something* (line 4). These writing requirements are described with a marker of evaluation expressed using a comparative adjective: *more open* (line 2), which indicates a more liberal approach in SCS to expressing students' position on a given topic. Writing for Global Politics, on the other hand, is presented as more rooted in students' showing their familiarity with hard *facts* (line 2) and showing precise understanding (line 6) of key concepts (lines 4-5). Natasha in her account uses strong modal verbs *have to* (lines 1, 2 and 5) and *can't* (line 4) when describing writing requirements in Global Politics. She also uses markers of evaluation such as *more correct* and *more specific* (line 6) to indicate preferred ways of engagement with disciplinary knowledge in that module. Towards the end she again presents her strong position making a statement using non-hypothetical modality (Fairclough, 2003): *if you want to of course a good score* (lines 6-7).

The other representation offered during the students' interviews portrays writing in different academic modules in terms of students' ability to produce different text types as illustrated in extract 13:

Student interview – extract 13

- 1 David: *SCS is focused on your ideas, your critical thinking and your logic, especially your*  
2 *logic. You should write your article [i.e. an essay] with critical thinking and your logic*  
3 *should be very clear. But, for the Commerce Administration, I just write only one essay and*  
4 *that essay is not a very real article; it is the term essay, it is just the analysis report. So I*  
5 *just used the model in Commerce Administration to see for five different points. And I think*  
6 *you just, in the Commerce Administration essay or Business report, I just present some*  
7 *structural data and some structural information, and then draw the conclusion or solution*  
8 *for some business problem. It doesn't very care about your own opinion or your own logic;*  
9 *the most important point of the Business report is the data, the evidence you have to find,*  
10 *you find. Yes, I think that is the differences between these things. (lines 35-45/III)*

In this extract, the demands of writing for SCS and CA are discussed as requiring different text types and subsequently different engagement with ideas. In SCS students are expected to write an *article [i.e. an essay]* displaying their *critical thinking* and *logic* (lines 1-2); whereas in CA students are expected write a *Business report* (line 6) and demonstrate *the data* and *the evidence* (line 9). The report is described as different from an essay: *it is not a very real article* (line 4); it consists of the examination of *five different points* (line 5) by presenting *structural data and some structural information* (lines 6-7) which leads to conclusions that offer *solution for some business problem* (lines 7-8). When presenting these differences in requirements, David uses strong markers of modality such as *should* (line 2), and *have to* (line 9), as well as evaluative statements *very clear* (line 3) and *the most important* (line 9).

The above representations of writing requirements in different academic modules resonate with the Academic Literacies perspective which indicates that 'from the student point of view a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another [and] to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159). The students' understanding of differences in writing requirements across academic modules and their ability to articulate these differences appears to indicate that even though they are offered general writing classes, they are still able to notice the differences in requirements across academic modules. This seems to confirm that students are aware of the fact that what they learn in writing classes offers a type of foundation for their writing rather than a set of skills that they can transfer, without much reflection, to their writing in disciplinary modules.

Support in understanding writing requirements

My data revealed that students' understanding of what is required from them in academic writing is underpinned by support offered by writing and academic tutors. Students' representation of the roles that both writing and academic tutors play in the support portrays writing tutors as those who offer support regarding textual/language features, and indicates that the input from academic tutors is often restricted to clarifications related to a given subject content and assignment question. Extracts 15 and 16 illustrate this representation:

Student interview – extract 15

- 1 David: *Writing tutor, for example, is Robert. He will give me some language support and*
- 2 *some academical writing support: how I put write and excellence academical article [i.e. an*
- 3 *essay], difference from other normal common article, and how to use the professional*
- 4 *cohesion, how to formal grammar, formal work. And for the subject lecturer, they will give*
- 5 *me the ideas, especially the ideas and knowledge, Business or SCS. (lines 134-139/III)*

Student interview – extract 16

- 1 Luana: *The writing tutor, he gave us like rules and, you know, the norms which you have to*
- 2 *follow, you know, "You have to do this, this, this and this to get to a good essay, to write a*
- 3 *good essay," you know, so they gave us, you know, and even they gave us some tips of*
- 4 *methodology which we could follow... tips like brainstorming or, you know, outline ... Yeah,*
- 5 *so it was mainly doing the classes and, you know, mainly doing the classes. And from*
- 6 *subject lecturers... yeah, first of all they helped us with the content which, you know, we had*
- 7 *to write, and I... actually I didn't... like the main support which they gave us was explaining*
- 8 *the question about... the question on which we were going to try to answer in the essay, so*
- 9 *we could, you know, fulfil the answering of the question fully. (lines 172-184/III)*

Support that students receive in writing classes is described in these two extracts with reference to surface features that focus on *language support* (extract, 15 line 1), developing students' familiarity with *rules* and *norms* of essay writing (extract 16, lines 1-3) as well as elements of *cohesion*, *grammar* and formality of academic prose (extract 15, line 4). Support offered by academic tutors is represented as having to do with *ideas and knowledge* (extract 15, lines 4-5) and as such being focused on *the content* and *explaining the question* so that the students can provide an acceptable answer to the question (extract 16, lines 8-9). This representation seems to indicate that writing is separate from disciplinary knowledge, and it implies a division between the subject 'content' and writing as a 'non-content' element. This representation resonates with the tutor interview data, discussed in the preceding chapter. Stephen, a SCS tutor, explicitly referred to writing as *a non-content material* (see Chapter 5, extract 12, lines 1-2). I will further refer to this in my discussion chapter.

The commitment to this representation, showing the division between writing and subject content, is rather high and can be inferred from markers of modality such as modal verbs *will* (extract 15, lines 1 and 4), *have to* (extract 16, lines 1 and 2). There are also markers of evaluation such as the use of the noun *excellence* (extract 15, line 2), adjective *professional* (extract 15, line 3), discourse relative marker *formal* (extract 15, line 4), noun phrase *good essay* (extract 16, lines 2 and 3), verb *help* (extract 16 line 6), and adjective *main* (extract, 16 line 7).

The separation of writing and disciplinary knowledge was a recurrent feature in students' accounts. Students reported that writing classes were *general about the essay* (Natasha 232/I). They also said that writing classes were *very useful, very helpful* (Nicole 527/I), but at the same time some students reported that they *can't apply* general writing rules *directly* (Monica 327/II) to the demands of writing in academic modules. Students reported that applying what they learnt in writing classes to their assignments in academic modules was described as *not easy* and this process was compared to trying *to see through the cloud* (Ronnie 457/II). One of the students described this process in terms associated with hazardous activities and said that it is *like gambling* (Nicole 281/III). Students would also say that writing tutors were *not permitted* (Nicole 578/I) to help with writing in subject modules. Academic tutors would offer examples of specific requirements (for instance, a tutor in Commerce Administration or Global Politics would show students examples of assignments), but the students said that this support was rather limited and that the tutors were not very specific and therefore not very helpful. Students often indicated that it was not in the academic tutors' capacity to help them with writing: *it's not their job ... they can't help us with the essay* (Nicole 507/II). Students also indicated that they would welcome greater clarity and specific guidelines from academic tutors: *the tutors [academic tutors] they should comment about the essay what they want to know, what they need, what they need* (Ethan 617-618/III).

## 6.2.2 Responding to writing requirements

The preceding sections discussed students' representations of sub-themes categorised under the first theme, namely their understanding of writing requirements. In this section I move on to discussing the second theme which refers to students' approach to responding to writing requirements. Drawing on the thematic analysis of the interview data, I will present the analysis of four sub-themes: choosing a topic, reading, preparing drafts and peer-reviewing/networking with friends.

### Choosing a topic

Student interview data suggests that when students begin their work on an essay, they typically spend a good amount of time considering the essay questions and deciding on their topic choice. This process of choosing their essay topic is usually discussed in terms of engagement with both personal background and familiarity with a given subject content:

#### Student interview – extract 17

- 1 Monica: *I think the important thing is to choose the topic. If I choose something about such*
- 2 *as 'enlightenment, continental philosophy' it would be very hard for me to write and 'death*
- 3 *penalty' in [my country] it's a familiar topic, so I choose that one. It can help me to develop*
- 4 *my opinion if I know the topic very clearly and I think that's the basic reason why I can get*
- 5 *not a bad result...I discovered it by myself.* (lines 202-209/II)

This extract shows that choosing a topic is motivated by students' familiarity with a given subject area: *it's a familiar topic* (line 3), and students' knowledge: *if I know the topic very clearly* (line 4). To support that rationale, Monica gives an example of certain topics being more familiar to her, for example *death penalty* (lines 2-3), due to her personal background as in her country this topic is present in discussions in the public domain. This extract also indicates that the choice of an essay question is of importance to students' ability to write an essay that will receive a satisfactory grade (line 5).

The process of choosing a topic as underpinned by familiarity with a given subject is represented in extract 17 with strong speaker commitment. This is evidenced, for example, in Monica's use of the verb *help* (line 3) which functions here as a marker of evaluation (see 'assumed values' Fairclough, 2003, p. 173) indicating that knowing subject content is useful in guiding student's choice. The strong commitment is also

represented by a non-hypothetical statement: *If I know the topic clearly ... I cannot get a bad result* (lines 4-5).

In the student interviews the choice of essay topics was also discussed in the context of consultation with academic tutors. Extract 18 below illustrates this representation:

Student interview – extract 18

- 1 David: *After I got the requirements I took one to two weeks, more or less one to two weeks to*
- 2 *think about the topics and make sure my main direction, what I want to write... because*
- 3 *there are different topics I can choose. And after that, after I make sure my direction, I will*
- 4 *ask my teacher, SCS teacher and CA teacher, ask their opinion, is my thinking okay. And*
- 5 *after that they have comments and I will find some books, find some articles, on the website*
- 6 *and in the library.* (lines 267-272/I)

Here choosing a topic is represented as a lengthy process lasting *one to two weeks* (line 1) and involving *thinking about the topic* (line 2), choosing a *direction* (line 2) and, finally, consulting academic tutors: *I will ask my teacher, SCS teacher and CA teacher* (lines 3-4). The consultation with academic tutors is portrayed as an important step in validating students' reasoning: *ask their opinion, is my thinking okay* (line 4) and in helping them to begin engaging with their reading: *after that they have comments and I will find some books* (line 5). The importance of consultation with academic tutors is marked with strong modal verbs *will* (line 3 and 5) as well as a marker of evaluation, an adjective *okay* (line 4). These markers of modality and evaluation (Fairclough, 2003) indicate strong speaker commitment to the proposition made.

Extracts 17 and 18 speak towards the importance of engagement with disciplinary knowledge in the process of writing. Extract 18 gives an example of one student, David, having to juggle writing two assignments and approaching tutors in both modules for advice. It can be inferred from these extracts that the David sees the differences in requirements in these two modules (see also extract 13 from David's interview data).



### Reading

In their interviews students indicate that reading is seen by them an essential part of the writing process. They commonly say that reading *a lot of books is very crucial for the writing of an essay* (Nicole 200/III) and that in the process of writing *the most useful is the reading skill* (David 558/I). Their accounts portray reading as a meaning making activity focused on engagement with ideas which then shape students' thinking about a given topic and eventually leads them to being able to develop a text structure:

#### Student interview – extract 19

- 1 Natasha: *In general I need time for thinking...I don't know how long it takes but I have some*  
2 *period for thinking in general what about topics, what I think, what is my opinions. Next, I*  
3 *read several books and articles and maybe make sense in the internet, some kind of*  
4 *information. I collected this information what I thought was appropriate for my essay. I have*  
5 *in one file everything; yes, I tried to put here because it's easier to think...After this I have*  
6 *some kind of outlines but it's not always same because I think maybe this way or this way*  
7 *will change it, switch. And I can put my ... some kind of examples or evidence ... First of all*  
8 *I think, next I read. By reading I underline what I write. Next, I collect in one place. Next, I*  
9 *read what I have in general and my opinions also, and I construct ... like to build a house or*  
10 *something like this. It's my strategy. (lines 261-270.284-287/I)*

In this extract, reading is described on the level of meaning making. It is preceded by a period of *thinking in general* (line 2) about the topics, and deciding on the topic which allows the students to begin reading. The reading process is represented as oriented towards gathering information that supports students' ideas: *collected this information what I thought was appropriate for my essay* (line 4). The information is processed and kept *in one file* (line 5) and used to develop an *outline* (line 6), which is then subject to multiple changes: *maybe this way or this way will change it* (lines 6-7). This process of engagement with reading is metaphorically described in this extract as a process similar to *building a house* (line 9).

Such representation of reading as meaning making which focuses on developing students' knowledge of a given topic and helps to structure students' written assignments was often reflected in students' interview accounts. For example, Ronnie described writing as *a kind of process: reading about these topics and it took lots of time, but after that it was much easier when we knew how we wanted to structure or what we wanted to write about* (231-233/I).

Such representation of reading as a foundation to meaning making is offered with confidence. Extract 19 uses declarative statements, which express strong commitment, when describing the reading-writing process, for example *I read* (lines 2-3), *I collected* (line 4). In this extract there are two instances when the student appears to mitigate her otherwise strong commitment to this representation. This is expressed through the use of the verb *tried* (line 5) and in the subjectively marked statement *I think* (line 6). In this extract there is also a marker of evaluation expressed using an evaluative statement: *it's easier* (line 5), which denotes that engagement with reading on the level of meaning making assists the students in the process of writing. Such markers of evaluation which signal strong speaker commitment are also evident in previously cited extracts including: *much easier* (Ronnie 231-233/I), *very crucial* (Nicole 200/III), *the most useful* (David 558/I).

Another representation of reading describes it as an activity that assists students in their learning of how to articulate ideas in a given field or on a given topic. Extracts 20 and 21 give examples:

Student interview – extract 20

- 1 Alice: *I try to read Economics or Financial Times because they mention a lot of business*
- 2 *terms ... and tried to read our own textbook...and tried to assimilate the sentence structure.*
- 3 *I try that I adopt many sentence structure from the test book and the books from library.*  
(lines 280-289/III)

Student interview – extract 21

- 1 Sophia: *But I remember that for example I learned the word 'believers' because I put the*
- 2 *word in the draft, which is a word thief, ... a word thief just doesn't exist. Believers like*
- 3 *brotherhood, words... I needed words linked with religious topics.* (lines 237-240/II)

In these two short extracts, reading is portrayed as a source of learning discipline specific terms, for example *business terms* (extract 20, lines 1-2), and words related to a given topic, for example *believers* (extract 21, line 1) as a word *linked with religious topics* (extract 21, line 3). Extract 20 also mentions *sentence structure* (line 2) which shows that students pay attention to sentence structures while reading: that helps them to improve their own sentences when writing. Such representation is offered with a relatively high degree of commitment. This is evidenced in verbs such as *adopt* (extract 20, line 3) and *learned* (extract 21, line 1) which signal that since students 'adopt' or 'learn' certain language features, they view them as desirable. Some lesser amount of commitment is indicated by the use of the verb *try* (extract 20, lines 1 and

3) as a marker of modalisation. This may indicate some level of uncertainty as to whether what they do is appropriate and helpful.

As evidenced in students' accounts, reading features as important in students' endeavours to write their assignments. Natasha in extract 19 offered a rather pungent metaphor comparing the input of reading to writing as a process similar to *building a house* (line 9). Even though reading seems to be implied in the Academic Literacies approach, as literacy denotes reading and writing, the research on student writing in the frame of Academic Literacies has not yet considered reading a part of empirical studies on student writing. As the Academic Literacies approach 'views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159), it appears important to turn attention to students' engagement with disciplinary epistemology through their engagement with reading. I will discuss this further in Chapter 8.

### Preparing drafts

In responding to writing requirements student interviewees suggest that it is important to write drafts and learn how to improve the drafts from feedback offered by writing tutors during personal tutorials.

All of the students in my data agreed that when working on their assignments they start by writing a series of drafts. The number of drafts differs depending on the particular topic. Writing drafts is seen by students as a process that helps to refine ideas:

#### Student interview – extract 22

- 1 Luana: *I try to write one and then rewrite this same one, but when I had... like in the second*
- 2 *term for example for SCS I wrote three different, completely different drafts, with even*
- 3 *different references, different ideas. So, yeah, so like several drafts would be like from three*
- 4 *to five drafts. (...) And also... that's it. You have to read and re-read and re-read, re-read*
- 5 *your essay, read again, read again, read again. And a thing which I found really useful was*
- 6 *to, after I wrote it, like my last essay, my last draft which I felt really sure of it, I just left the*
- 7 *essay in the computer and went to do my stuff in life: I took a while to do; I had fun, had*
- 8 *dinner, de-de-de. Two days after I sat again and read again and then I was able to correct*
- 9 *much better, you know. So it's important for you to have time also, even time, even free time*
- 10 *of not thinking about the essay is important in the process of writing. (lines 279-291/III)*

In this extract writing drafts is portrayed as a way of engaging with ideas: *for SCS I wrote three different, completely different drafts, with even different references, different ideas* (lines 2-3). The process is described as recurring for students engage in very close reading of their own texts: *You have to read and re-read and re-read, re-read your essay, read again, read again, read again* (lines 4-5). This leads to students achieving a high level of certainty in their own take on a given topic: *my last draft which I felt really sure of* (line 6). This extract also indicates that reflection or refining ideas takes time as it is achieved by seeking some distance from the process of writing: *I just left the essay* (lines 6-7) and *two days after I sat again and read again and then I was able to correct much better* (lines 8-9), *even free time of not thinking about the essay is important in the process of writing* (lines 9-10).

This representation is offered with high degree of commitment expressed in markers of modality, such as verbs *have to* (line 4), *was able to* (line 8). There are also markers of evaluation that signal speaker's attitude to the propositions made as highly desirable: *really useful* (line 5) and *it's important* (lines 9 and 10).

Writing drafts is also represented as a process that helps to improve the text quality with regard to surface text features:

Student interview – extract 23

- 1 David: *[My writing tutor] tell me you should be carefully about vocabulary especially some*
- 2 *vocabulary maybe have the similar meaning but in fact their real names are not the same,*
- 3 *just similar...So, in this relation you can use this vocabulary but another vocabulary with*
- 4 *similar meaning you cannot use in this situation, just similar. ...And for the structure he also*
- 5 *said, because the first draft I submitted, within the paragraph is too long, it's more than 300*
- 6 *words in the paragraph and the idea get lost in this long paragraph. So he remind me to*
- 7 *divide my paragraphs. And the structure, because some paragraphs in my essay is too long*
- 8 *so the structure is not clear. If I can divide it in the short paragraphs maybe it's helpful to...*
- 9 *for the reader to get the idea.* (lines 317-329/II)

This extract discussed working with drafts in terms of surface features such as vocabulary and text structure. Writing drafts helps to improve precision of expression with regard to vocabulary choice: *vocabulary maybe have the similar meaning but in fact their real names are not the same* (line 2), and *another vocabulary with similar meaning you cannot use in this situation* (lines 3-4). With regard to the text structure, writing drafts gives a chance to improve the quality of paragraphs: *the paragraph is too long* (line 5), *the idea get lost in this long paragraph* (line 6), and *the structure is*

*not clear* (line 8). This representation is linked to the notion of readership, as the improvements in surface level features of text and language are helpful for *the reader to get the idea* (line 9). Working on drafts is represented with a high degree of commitment expressed with the use of the modal verb *should* (line 1), and marker of evaluation *it's helpful* (line 8).

When discussing the process of working on drafts, students refer to both engagement with ideas and meaning making (extract 22) as well as to surface text features (extract 23). This indicates that all of these elements are important in the process of writing, and even though they can be characterised in terms of different approaches, i.e. Academic Literacies and Study Skills, students' accounts in this section seem to confirm that 'the models are not mutually exclusive' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158) but rather that they are complementary.

#### Peer-reviewing and networking

When working on their written assignments, students suggested that they engaged in discussions of their texts with classmates and with friends. The discussion with classmates took place as a part of peer-review activities in the classroom, while the discussions with friends took place in the students own study time.

In the interview data, peer-reviewing in class is represented as a generic activity that helps to both guide students' thinking and improve the quality of the text:

#### Student interview – extract 24

- 1 Alice: *we can read other people's essay and point where the structure, the thesis statement,*
- 2 *why introduction is clear or it has the main point or something like that, so it was really*
- 3 *helpful because I could... I know it's just general comment, you know, it can't really deeply*
- 4 *think or understand my whole essay with ten minute reading about that but generally we can*
- 5 *talk about that and sometimes there's a grammar mistake could say each other, so it was*
- 6 *really helpful.* (lines 262-268/I)

In this extract, peer-reviewing is represented on the level of surface text features, such as *the structure, the thesis statement* (line 1), *introduction* (line 2), and surface features of language, for example *grammar mistakes* (line 5). The discussion is represented as being rather *general* in nature (line 3) and short: *ten minute* (line 4). Such engagement with students' writing is described as somewhat superficial: *can't really deeply think* (lines 3-4), but at the same time *really helpful* (lines 2-3 and 6). In this extract speaker

commitment is expressed with such markers of modality as *can* (lines 1 and 4), *can't* (line 3), *could* (line 5), and such markers of evaluation as *really helpful* (lines 2-3 and 6).

The data also suggests that while working on their assignments outside of the writing classroom, students work with a network of friends from the same academic discipline. Extract 25 offers an example of such representation:

Student interview – extract 25

- 1 Alice: *Discussion was really nice because one of my colleague... can I say colleague? Yeah,*
- 2 *one of my colleague has same title but opposed idea, position, so... but we have a different*
- 3 *perspectives because she has a feminist point of view so obviously we are different, but just*
- 4 *discuss about the topic with her was really helpful, yeah, yeah, yeah, because you have to*
- 5 *insist your position in that direction. And we have same concept or anyway same title, so we*
- 6 *can share the ideas; it was really helpful.* (lines 292-298/II)

This extract which raises the issue of discussing assignments with friends is represented on the level of engagement with a given academic discipline. The discussions are conducted with colleagues who chose the *same title* (line 2) for their assignments and who view a given area with an *opposed idea, position* (line 2). Discussing with someone who has *different perspectives* (lines 2-3) is represented as *really helpful* (line 4) in defending one's position: *you have to insist on your position in that direction* (lines 4-5). Being able to *share the ideas* (line 6) with others is here described as *really helpful* (line 6). This representation is offered with a high degree of speaker commitment expressed through a modal verb *have to* (line 4) and in markers of evaluation such as *really nice* (line 1), *really helpful* (lines 4 and 6).

During the interviews the students indicated that they would either meet with friends or exchange drafts by email and chat on-line using different communication tools, for example *MSN Messenger* or *Hotmail messenger* (Ethan 588/I). They would prefer to discuss their drafts with *friends who choose the same subject* (Ethan 345/III) or *do the same topic* (Monica 223/III) as they *share the experience* (David 473/I) of writing within the same academic discipline.

As evidenced in the data discussed above, networking with other students constitutes an important part of making sense of subject knowledge and of accessing disciplinary meaning. When working on their assignments, more often than not, students tend to reach out to others, especially to those who share their disciplinary affiliations. This seems to emphasise that students' approach to writing assignments does not entail an exclusive focus on the text, but rather the student data indicates that writing is a complex process of intellectual engagement. It includes talking to others and debating ideas, reading to both assimilate knowledge and engage with a given subject, and it also includes spending time thinking about a given topic, developing ideas and making connections with what students already know. These various activities related to student writing practises have not featured so far in the Academic Literacies research on student writing; however, as they constitute an integral part of student engagement with writing, it appears the Academic Literacies perspective should be extended to include those intellectual elements of students' endeavours to respond to the demands of written assessment. I will discuss this further in Chapter 8.

### **6.3 Summary of findings**

This chapter presented the findings from the analysis of interview data with student writers. The two themes discussed were: 'understanding writing requirements' and 'responding to writing requirements'. The analysis of these two thematic areas has shown that students' perceptions of assignment writing draw on so called 'generic support' but also move beyond to include engagement with disciplinary knowledge and meaning making characteristic of given academic disciplines. Such student engagement with writing shows that generic support offered to students in the writing classes constitute only one aspect of a wider picture. It also shows that the 'study skills' model associated with institutional writing support should not be treated in opposition to other models but, as student interview data indicate and in line with the Academic Literacies perspective, the 'study skills' model should be regarded as a constituent part of a broader framework of student writing support. Such a perspective is in line with Lea and Street (1998) who argue that different models of writing support 'are not mutually exclusive' (p. 158), but that each of the models has a different focus and adds different elements to student understanding of disciplinary writing.

Another insight that emerged from the data analysis is that students' approach to writing does not start with their attempts to develop a text, but rather it is preceded with a long intellectual process of seeking engagement with disciplinary knowledge. Students spend time (*two or three weeks*) choosing a topic, then they consider the topic in relation to what they already know about a given subject, then they spend a great deal of time reading and discussing their ideas, and only then they finally attempt to 'turn their ideas into a text' (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 2003, p. 1). This intellectual engagement constitutes a departure from textually oriented writing support, as for example evidenced in classroom observation data (see Chapter 4) where students during the same session, as for example in classes with Tom (see Section 4.2.1), choose a topic and then are asked to develop an outline, even without the understanding of a given subject area. As the intellectual process which student-writers engage in while preparing for writing is oriented towards the disciplinary content and ways of constructing knowledge in a given discipline, it seems that extending models of writing support to include explicit focus on reading and debating knowledge prior to developing a text could be an area suitable for a more discipline specific writing support. Even though the Academic Literacies approach has not explored reading and debating disciplinary knowledge as a part of writing support, its focus on disciplinary meaning making indicates the potential of this approach to be extended in that direction. I will address this issue later in my discussion chapter.

In the next chapter, I maintain my current focus on student-writers, but I move on from drawing only on the interview data, and I turn to exploring student written assignments. Having investigated what is going on in the writing classroom (Chapter 4), having examined perspectives of writing and academic tutors (Chapter 5), and having engaged with students' interview accounts (this Chapter), in the following chapter I take the next, and at the same time final, step in my analytical discussions and investigate students' essays. As such in Chapter 7, I will focus on two main issues: how students construct their texts and whether or not these texts respond to disciplinary requirements of written assessment.



## Chapter 7 - Students' essays: writing across modules

### 7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 constitutes the last of my four data chapters. In the preceding three chapters, I engaged with issues related to student writing support through analysis of classroom observation data (Chapter 4), and through the analysis of interview data with tutors (Chapter 5) and student-writers (Chapter 6). This chapter focuses on the analysis of the end-of-term assignments written by my student participants for their academic modules offered on the Pre-Masters Programme. The findings reported in this chapter contribute to the understanding of my fourth research question: *How do students construct answers to essay questions in their academic modules, and to what extent do their answers meet academic tutors' expectations?*

In this chapter I engage with four essays written in the same period of study by two students: Luana and Natasha. The essays were submitted for summative assessment in the second term of the academic year in two different academic modules: Socio-Cultural Studies and Global Politics. Both Luana and Natasha authored one essay in each of these modules. In line with the Academic Literacies perspective, I conducted a close textual analysis of these four essays in relation to tutor feedback and student interview data (Lea & Street, 1998). I treat those four essays as 'case studies of different perspectives' (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 160) on issues related to student writing and to institutional writing support. Engaging with those essays, I seek to offer analytic commentary on how students achieve meaning in their texts and whether their intended meaning meets the expectations of those who assess their writing. In that sense the presented 'case studies can point to important theoretical questions and connections that might not otherwise be raised' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 160), such as, for example, specific expectations that academic tutors hold with regard to student writing, students' understanding of writing requirements or students' approach to assignment writing. As my underlying aim is neither in evaluating writing achievement of all of the students in my research sample nor in establishing prevailing textual patterns in their writing, in this chapter I do not draw on all the samples of student writing gathered during the data collection (see Section 3.3.3 for a description of student writing data set), but instead I have focused on specific cases. When

selecting essays for the analysis, I was guided by qualitative purposive sampling and chose 'information-rich cases' (Patton, 1990, p. 169), that is samples of student writing with which I collected most of the supplementary data. Both Luana and Natasha, apart from sharing with me their texts, also offered additional documents, such as tutor feedback comments and copies of their essays with tutor annotations in the margins. In Luana's case she also offered a mind-map that she developed while working on her SCS assignment.

In terms of close textual analysis of students' essays, I draw on the 'hidden features' framework (Street, 2009) which describes criteria that are not always made explicit by the tutors but that are used by academic assessors when evaluating student writing. The criteria in Street's 'hidden features' framework include, for example: framing, opening, structure, conclusions, voice or stance. As explained in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.2.2), I adjusted this framework to my data by taking account of the educational level of my students and the type of academic texts they were required to produce. For instance, I did not focus on 'voice' as the issue of voice did not come up in my data, but I did include 'stance' which, in my work, I referred to 'student's taking position on a given topic' as this more closely reflected how this concept was used in tutor and student data. Bearing in mind the 'hidden features' criteria, in my textual analysis I worked with a model of argumentative essay structure (Hyland, 1990) and rhetorical devices for developing a coherent, convincing and reader oriented argument (Hyland, 2005; Nunan, 1993). Specific rhetorical devices that I focused on include 'transitions', 'frame markers', 'hedges' and 'evidentials' and 'demonstrative reference' (see Section 2.4.2.2 for their detailed characterisations). I used these tools taking a social practice stance with an aim to understand how students constructed their texts rather than in an attempt to detail a textual analysis of students' essays. From that perspective, examining essay structure and focusing on selected rhetorical devices used in students' texts is helpful in exploring students' texts and in developing an understanding of how students compose their answers to essay questions and, more specifically, how they mediate their intended meaning through the use of structural features and discoursal elements of persuasive academic prose.

The following sections of this chapter present the analysis of Luana's and Natasha's written assignments. In each of the sections I start by introducing students' topic choices (Sections 7.2 and 7.3 respectively). Then, I move on to engage with the textual analysis of a given student's essays, and I attempt to understand student writing in the light of tutors' appraisals offered in the feedback sheets and in annotations on the margins (Sections 7.2.1 and 7.3.1). Finally, I also take account of students' comments on how they accomplished the task of essay writing (Sections 7.2.2 and 7.3.2). The chapter closes with a comparative summary of findings (Section 7.4).

## 7.2 Luana's essay writing

I begin with the exploration of Luana's pursuance of essay writing as an example of how student familiarity with textual organisation may not be sufficient in helping the student to respond to specific, often hidden, demands of written assessment and gain equally high marks across the academic modules. Luana's two essays that form the basis for my analysis in this section were written on topics related to gender studies and international political relations. The first essay topic, for a compulsory module in Socio-Cultural Studies, required students to explore different perspectives on gender and sex, namely gender viewed as the social construction and sex as a biological fact. The second essay topic, for an elective module in Global Politics, was aimed at debating the nature of current transatlantic relations between the United States (US) and European Union (EU). Specific essay titles and additional documentary data offered by Luana with the copies of her texts are given in Table 7.1 below:

**Table 7.1 Luana's essays: topic choices and gathered data**

<b>Academic module</b>	<b>Essay title</b>	<b>Additional documents</b>
<b>Socio-Cultural Studies</b> (compulsory)	<i>How valid is the distinction made between sex (biological fact) and gender (social construct)?</i>	Feedback sheet and marginalia; mind-map
<b>Global Politics</b> (elective)	<i>Do you think that the metaphor used by Kagan comparing US to Mars and the EU to Venus is accurate characterisation of the state of transatlantic relations in the XXI century? Discuss your answer.</i>	Feedback sheet and marginalia

Both in the Socio-Cultural Studies essay and in the Global Politics one, Luana was praised for developing a well written text. In her SCS essay, in which the focus was on taking a position and supporting her position by debating various ideas, she received comments that, overall, highlighted her ambition in approaching the topic, and regardless of some overgeneralised statements pointed out by the tutor, her essay was recognised as being of excellent academic quality, and she was awarded an A. In her GP essay, the focus was also on presenting student's position but the position taken by the student was to be supported not that much by debating ideas but by providing detailed factual information related to a given topic. Her GP tutor recognised the complexity of the argument that Luana put forward, but eventually awarded her a B+ for her work. In her interviews Luana commented that the SCS essay was more *in her field*; whereas, the GP as an academic discipline was *new* to her. She also indicated that developing textual structure for both essays was not a simple matter of applying what she had learnt in writing classes to the writing of her essays in the academic modules. In the analysis presented in the following sections, I will illustrate how Luana's essays were constructed in terms of textual development, how tutors engaged with the disciplinary content discussed by Luana in her work, and what Luana's perspectives were on approaching the writing of these essays and responding to specific demands of disciplinary assessment. In my analysis I seek to explore tutors' emic perspectives on Luana's writing and Luana's emic perceptions of what assisted or prevented her from fulfilling the demands of assessment.

### **7.2.1 Very good paragraph - tutors' comments**

Luana's academic tutors evaluated her essays as being very well-written in terms of textual organisation. Her SCS tutor did not make any specific comments on the text of the essay, but in the feedback sheet he indicated that the 'organisation' and 'structure' of her text were *excellent*. Even though the GP tutor in the feedback sheet gave a slightly less favourable evaluation, marking her work as *good* rather than *excellent*, he annotated three paragraphs in her essay as being *very well written*. The tutors' comments were expressed in very general wording and as such did not reveal what made the tutors give Luana's essays such positive evaluations and recognise her texts as adhering to the expectations of suitable or appropriate textual development. In an

attempt to understand how the essays were constructed, I engaged in a textual analysis of both essays.

A close reading of Luana's essays indicates that her two assignments were structured in a very similar manner. Both SCS and GP essays were eight paragraphs long, with two initial paragraphs devoted to the thesis stage; the next five paragraphs comprised the argument stage and the last paragraph formed the concluding stage. In the thesis stage, the first paragraph of each essay presented contextual information ('information move') and attempted to raise the readers' interest by problematizing the topic ('gambit move'). The second paragraph of both essays presented the student's position ('proposition move') and offered an overview of how the essays will develop ('marker move'). Subsequent paragraphs, constituting the argument stage, were carefully structured with each of the paragraphs having a clear central claim ('claim move') and support substantiated with reference to numerous sources ('support move'). The final paragraph of both essays, presented conclusions consolidating the claims ('consolidation move') put forward in the argument stage and reaffirming the student's position ('affirmation move'). Moreover, in both of her essays, Luana took care to signal to the readers the development of her argument by the use of 'frame markers' and, whenever appropriate, to indicate the relationship between the ideas by the use of 'transitions' and 'demonstrative reference'. At times, she also attempted to use 'hedges' to indicate her position towards the statements made. Both her essays drew on a variety of sources ('evidentials') establishing her as a credible and authoritative writer. A detailed analysis of her GP and SCS essays can be found in Appendices 7.2 and 7.3 respectively. Below, I will illustrate how Luana developed her texts by presenting analytical accounts of two paragraphs excerpted from her GP essay and one paragraph from her SCS essay.

Extract 1 quotes the second paragraph from Luana's Global Politics essay (the annotation key for students' essay data is included in Appendix 7.1). The quoted paragraph follows the introductory paragraph which contextualised the topic of US and EU relations. These two paragraphs comprise the thesis stage of her essay. Paragraph 1 was commented on by the tutor as *very well made*. The second paragraph that I am presenting here was commented on by the module tutor marking the text as: *Very clear, very interesting. Let's see if you able to deliver on these expectations*.

Extract 1 – Luana's GP essay: paragraph 2

1 ***This essay will discuss*** the transatlantic relation between US and EU pending to the  
2 divergences of strategic and solidarity views specially in the Middle East (***Lindberg, 2005***).  
3 ***In the same time, this essay will also point out*** the importance of European and American  
4 alliance besides any difference of character and style to deal with problems and results  
5 [**proposition move**]. ***Beginning with*** describing the past situation of Europe and the present  
6 perseverance of stability and peace in opposition of the new hegemonic role of the US, I will  
7 draw the basis of the new transatlantic relations. ***Secondly***, this essay will focus on the  
8 different responses towards XXI global security issues and the different perspective that  
9 each has by the acknowledgement of EU's inability of political power versus US's strong  
10 character in political measures with military enforcement, such as in Iraq war (***Cox, 2005***), in  
11 opposition of EU willingness to engage with the war and the absence of using military  
12 force. ***Thirdly***, the new character of relation will be observed much more by economical  
13 character (***Bretherton and Vogler, 1999***). ***Finally*** the decreasing status of NATO will restate  
14 the absence of security engagement and asymmetrical compromise between those two  
15 important economic partners, even though both still rely in each other as allies [**marker**  
16 **move**].

This paragraph comprises of two rhetorical moves. Namely, Luana first makes a 'proposition move' stating her position on the essay question (lines 1-4), and then, she makes a 'marker move' explaining how she intends to present and discuss the position taken by her (lines 5-15). In both the proposition and marker moves, Luana explicitly frames her discourse goals using 'frame markers': *this essay will discuss* (line 1), and *this essay will also point out* (line 3) and she also labels the stages in her argument: *beginning with* (line 5), *secondly* (line 7), *thirdly* (line 12), and *finally* (line 13). In her proposition move she signals the relationship between the two aims listed using a phrase *in the same time* (line 3) as a 'transition' device. In this paragraph, Luana also uses 'evidentials' by introducing sources that help her to support her claims (lines 2, 10, 13). As it can be seen from the analytical account, Luana carefully structured her text and used rhetorical devices that helped her to mediate the meaning. Taking into account that the GP tutor annotated this paragraph as *very clear* and *very interesting*, it may be claimed, therefore, that the GP tutor appears to have recognised the elements she used as desirable in the writing in political studies. For the sake of emphasising how Luana worked on both of her essays, it is worth noticing here that in Luana's SCS essay, her second paragraph (see Appendix 7.3) is structured in almost exactly the same manner as the second paragraph in her GP essay analysed in extract 1.

Extract 2 gives an example of another paragraph from Luana's GP essay, annotated with tutor's comment stating: *very good paragraph*. This is the fourth paragraph in the essay, and constitutes a part of the argument stage of her essay in which she discusses the grounds for the position taken by her in the thesis stage.

Extract 2 – Luana's GP essay: paragraph 4

1 The creation of NATO, against the USSR and the communist's threaten, by the US and  
2 Europe, fortified their alliance with political and military cooperation for the promotion of  
3 democracy (**The US Mission to the EU, 2010**) [**claim move**]. *However*, with the collapse of  
4 USSR and the unipolar structure with the end of the Cold War and US dominance, NATO  
5 became obsolete in its core purpose: against the Soviets and communists. *However*, NATO's  
6 still gave the military umbrella that secured stability to Europe especially because of its  
7 leadership of the US. Europe dependence on the American army and NATO was reinforced  
8 by the new European Kantian's strategy – increasing the importance of law and order  
9 through cooperation (**Wood, 2008**). *In contrast*, the US enforcing a much more Hobbesian  
10 strategy – pursuing security through international submission as a sovereign - as it  
11 willingness to solve problems more rapidly was necessary as any instability *may* threaten its  
12 hegemonic character (**Kagan, 2003; Lindberg, (2005)** [**support move**].

This paragraph starts with a 'claim move' (lines 1-3) pointing at strong *political and military cooperation* between the US and EU evidenced in the *creation of NATO*. Luana then proceeds to make a 'support move' (lines 3-12) substantiating her claim in a rather sophisticated manner by first signalling that currently NATO may be perceived as less powerful than it used to be in the past, and then rebutting that statement by offering evidence that indicates the strength and the importance of NATO. Luana uses 'transition' devices to signal the relationships between the ideas in her paragraph: *however* (lines 3 and 5) and *in contrast* (line 9). Moreover, to indicate her position, towards the end of the paragraph she mediates her meaning with a modal verb *may* (line 11), which functions as a 'hedge'. She also validates her arguments by reference to sources ('evidentials') in lines 3, 9 and 12.

Luana used similar ways of developing her argumentation in her SCS essay. As an example, in extract 3, the third paragraph of her SCS essay is quoted:

Extract 3 – Luana's SCS essay: paragraph 3

1 Men and women have different roles and activities in our society as a relation to gendered  
2 ideologies, which has been created over history (*ibid*) [**claim move**]. How men and women  
3 are recognized is a matter of impositions and expectations which *may* be transformed over  
4 time. They have different roles and activities in our society as a relation to the perspective of  
5 the society. Gendered ideologies *suggests* that not only men and women are viewed  
6 differently in our society but also which environment they will experience (**Broverman,**  
7 **1972**). *This may* be easily percept in patriarchal societies which inherit traditional views of  
8 feminine and masculine roles. Religious heritage in Christianity describes gender roles

9 consistently as commitments that each gender should follow (*Cahill, 2004*). As the *Catholic*  
10 *Church* argues, women's role is to be at the house, taking care of the family while men are  
11 expected to provide and protect. *Moreover*, "women should obey their husbands" (*St Paul*  
12 *Colossians 3:18*) and *would* be "saved through child-bearing" (*St Paul Timothy 2:15*).  
13 *These* expectancies are created around Christian thoughts of Eve being created from Adam's  
14 ribs, and her being the sinner that tempted Adam to eat the forbidden apple. The stereotype  
15 is established as women are labelled as tempters, weak and not wise enough to be aware of  
16 what is best for the family. *In opposition*, men *could* be considered wiser, having better  
17 judgement of things [support move].

In this paragraph, Luana starts by making a 'claim move' (lines 1-2) and stating that the difference between men's and women's roles in society has its roots in history and is underpinned by gendered ideologies. The rest of the paragraph constitutes the 'support move' (lines 2-17) and as such states the grounds that back her claim. By employing 'transitions', such as *moreover* (line 11) and *in opposition* (line 16), and by using 'demonstrative reference' realised in demonstrative pronouns *this* (line 7), and *these* (line 13), Luana makes an effort to signal the relationship between the ideas she presents. She also makes an attempt to indicate her position towards the mediated propositional meaning by hedging her statements using verbs such as: *may* (line 3 and 7), *suggest* (line 5), *would* (line 12) and *could* (line 16). Finally, she draws on a variety of 'evidentials' to bring in authoritative sources in support of her statements. Luana uses both in-text citations and direct quotes (lines 2, 6-7, 9, 11-12).

Based on the analytical discussions of extracts from Luana's essays, it can be stated that tutors' high appraisals of the textual structure of Luana's writing may be linked to her careful and consistent use of rhetorical devices that helped her to structure larger segments of the texts as well as to mediate her intended meaning on the clausal level. The presented analysis is helpful in understanding general comments of what tutors perceive as an *excellent* or *well-written* essay. This analysis, however, does not explain the difference in student achievement. While marking Luana's essays and annotating her texts, apart from commenting on textual elements, the tutors also made explicit comments on the propositional content of her essays, in particular with regard to how she engaged with ideas, arguments and factual information put forward in her discussion. To shed light on Luana's achievement, I will now move on to the analysis of Luana's essays by paying attention to tutors' annotations on the disciplinary content of her writing and to the overall feedback comments given on both her texts. I will start with her the SCS essay and then discuss the GP assignment.



The SCS tutor made extensive comments and remarks on Luana's essay which she wrote on the validity of the distinction between sex perceived as a biological fact and gender perceived as a social construct. In her essay Luana adopted a social constructivist stance and chose to argue that *there is no valid distinction between sex and gender* (see Appendix 7.3, paragraph 2). It is apparent from the SCS tutor's comments that he does not share Luana's point of view; however, what he questions in many of her paragraphs is not her position, but the soundness of her claims. For example, in her second paragraph, while explaining the aims of her essay, Luana writes: *[this essay] will argue that the attempt to distinguish both sexes by biological facts may be affected also by social constructions (Tuana, 1989). Both male and female have the same capabilities by their biological functioning.* The tutor annotated these statements by saying that they may be *true, but [are] nonetheless problematic* as the claims made by Luana are *large and counter-intuitive*. In other words, the tutor agreed that both sex and gender could be affected by social constructions, but he questioned the statement that *male and female have the same capabilities by their biological functioning*. The tutor saw that claim as being too large and going against the intuition. Another example, of the tutor disputing Luana's claims can be found in paragraph 6. Here, the student wrote that discriminations motivated by sex of a given person that might have previously existed in institutions but have now been eradicated: *In modern society both the genders transcended any sex barrier that traditional institutions use to deny this possibility.* The tutor commented on this statement by saying that he is *not sure that even the most optimistic liberal feminist would argue that this is the case*. Similarly to the previous example, the tutor's comment shows that he views Luana's statements as possibly being too general and over simplistic in nature. In another paragraph, the tutor questioned the validity of her statement. Namely, in paragraph 7 Luana attempted to debate the scientific evidence for gender roles. She wrote that *the pattern of depreciation as Reproduction Theories of Aristotle's explaining women's biology was proven to be mistaken*. The tutor annotated that sentence by writing *I'm not sure that you can make this claim*. Furthermore, apart from challenging the quality of Luana's claims, the tutor did not see the relevance of some her statements to the central argument pursued in her essay. In fact, he marked the whole of paragraph four as irrelevant to her assignment. In that paragraph she wrote about suffragettes, the stereotyping of women's roles and the glass ceiling. The tutor commented on that paragraph stating that *this paragraph is*

*almost totally irrelevant...the existence of the glass ceiling has no bearing on the question.* Drawing on tutor's annotations made on Luana's text and the analytical discussions presented thus far, it can be stated that in her SCS essay Luana presented claims that the tutor found rather challenging in terms of their validity and their significance to the overall argument.

Nevertheless, in his general feedback comments written on the feedback sheet attached to the essay, the concerns that the SCS tutor expressed in margin annotations were given much less attention. The tutor, in fact, signalled that the critical analysis in her essay was *excellent* and indicated that he valued Luana's engagement with the topic and the ambition with which she approached the discussion presented in her essay. Therefore, even though he was not convinced by her argumentation and saw issues with her point of view, he decided to give her essay an A. The tutor wrote:

*I don't think you quite make a convincing case for what you are arguing, but then I have serious problems with your viewpoint which I have outlined at the bottom of the essay. But I have given it [the essay] an A for ambition as much as for anything else.*

Based on these discussions, it can be argued that in the assignment in the Socio-Cultural Studies what counted as important was the student's ability to debate the ideas, to engage in a discussion with positions presented in the literature and to display a certain originality of thinking. The precision and the accuracy of the evidence used in the argument appear to have been of less importance, and therefore the student was awarded an A. In the Global Politics module, the requirements seem to have been set differently, as I will discuss below.

In comparison to the SCS tutor, the tutor marking the Global Politics assignment made fewer comments on the propositional content of Luana's essay. Her GP assignment was written on the topic of relations between the United States and the European Union, and the GP tutor's comments were less concerned with the ideas presented by the student but more with the accuracy of factual information. For example, in paragraph 3 of her text Luana writes: *The OECD subsequently transforms into the European community.* The tutor annotated this statement and, without engaging into debate with Luana's ideas, he simply pointed out that the statement was factually incorrect: *This is simply not true. You should be very careful with these details,*

*because at the exam they make a huge difference.* A similar example can be found in the GP tutor's annotations to one of the statements Luana made in the fifth paragraph of her essay. She wrote: *The EU, acting not much as an ally, disapproved the US' decision of going to war against Iraq, sustaining the argument of not having much political position, as EU did not argue against it also.* As in the case of his previous comment, the tutor did not engage with the ideas presented but challenged the accuracy of the information: *This sentence is both unclear and untrue. Some countries (see the declaration of the 10) clearly approved the US decision to launch a war on Iraq.* It can be inferred from the tutor's comments that attention to detail and factual precision are of considerable importance to the ways knowledge is presented in writing in Political Studies. This is explained in more detail in one more comment that the tutor made on the margins of Luana's text. Namely, in paragraph five the student writes:

*The different approach and reaction to conflicts such as Israel and Palestine can also exemplify the divergences between EU and US interests and actions. The former does not states officially its position while the former clearly recognizes the Israel causes much more than the Palestinians ([GP tutor's surname], 2010).*

In this sentence Luana attempts to support her claim using her lecture notes. The GP tutor comments in the following way:

*I am not sure if I have ever said this. My point during both the lecture and the seminar was that the US always have a 'first move' option when it comes to the Middle East, and the EU and its member countries always follow. The end result may be similar, but you have to pay more attention to these details.*

In his comment the tutor corrects Luana's factual information given in her essay, and explains specific details that he discussed in the lecture with regard to the roles that both the US and EU adopt as far as the nature of the international politics in the Middle East is concerned. More importantly, the tutor makes a 'meta' comment and explicitly states that attention to details is of great importance in Political Studies.

In his general comments given in the feedback sheet attached to her assignment, the Global Politics tutor evaluated Luana's critical analysis as *good* and appreciated the complexity of her overall argument. Moreover, he also explicitly stated that what counts as essential in the GP assignment is not only the engagement with ideas but

also the soundness of factual detail used as evidence in student's statements. The tutor wrote the following feedback note:

*The argument you provide is a complex one, as it takes into consideration both the security and the economic dimension, and you support it referring to a great range of sources. However, you should [pay] more attention to both factual inaccuracies (e.g.: it is not true that the EC developed from the OECD) and over-simplifications (you describe in an inaccurate way the way the US and the EU behave with respect to the Middle East). Even though they may seem minor details, these are the aspects that make a difference between a good and an excellent piece of work.*

As evident in the GP tutor feedback notes, the precision of factual information and careful interpretation of facts are of key importance to what counts as 'valid knowledge' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 170) in the Global Politics module. In the Socio-Cultural Studies module, on the other hand, the overall ability to think independently and to engage with ideas seemed to be given prominence over a general precision and exactness of claims made. Even though both essays were carefully structured with *very good paragraphs*, which was recognised by both tutors, the deciding factor in attributing grades for the assignment appears to be on the level of discipline specific requirements rather than overall textual development. The Global Politics tutor points that out specifically by stating that the difference between a *good* and an *excellent* essay lies in how a student constructs knowledge in a given discipline. From his perspective building a complex argument was not sufficient. Precision of factual data was equally important and relevant to presenting an *excellent* argument. In the next section, I will bring in Luana's perspective to shed light on how she constructed her essays and whether or not she was aware of the specific expectations that both Global Politics and Socio-Cultural Studies tutors appear to have had.

### **7.2.2 I'm a very creative person - Luana's comments**

My interviews with Luana revealed a number of different interpretations and underlying assumptions that she had regarding the writing of her assignments across the disciplinary fields and with respect to drawing, in that process, on what she learnt in the writing classes. She did not appear to be aware of diverse writing requirements that might be associated with writing in the SCS and GP modules. When explicitly asked about possible differences in tutor expectations in these two modules, Luana explained:

*I think it's similar. I think it's the same, you know the structure is the same, the academic conventions are the same, the analysis which you have to give is the same, using sources is the same; the only thing is the subject that is different for each. (38-42/III)*

In her interviews Luana explained that it is the textual structure that is the most important in the writing of an academic essay. She says: *That's the main point: to have this structure, everyone is able to understand everyone (587-588/II)*. In other words, she presents the textual structure as a secure and the most important way of mediating her meaning to the readers. Luana described her understanding of academic writing as

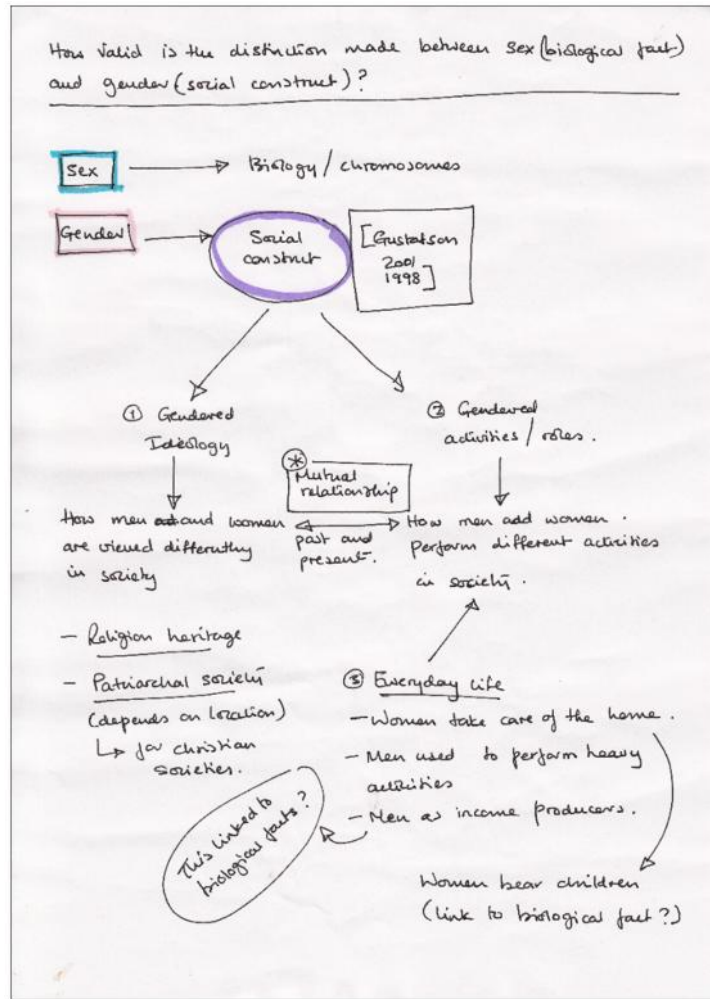
*...I think I could say it's an essay which is well organised and you can understand the essay even though if you don't understand the subject ... like for example if I write about the financial crisis and you come from Anthropology so you don't understand much Economy but, if it's a good essay, you will be able to read the essay and understand what the essay is saying although you don't have, you know, much knowledge in the area. (17-22/III)*

*...you have to use references to support your ideas, so like you make an analysis and you have to be able to support every argument which you are giving by using books and articles from respectable writers and academics, you know, like respectable sources. (26-30/III)*

It can be inferred from Luana's accounts that essay writing is a certain skill that can be described on the level of textual organisation, referencing, providing support for arguments and engaging in some sort of analysis that is intelligible to a non-specialist reader. She does not refer to disciplinary content as having any significant impact on the way a text is structured or on the way in which an argument is pursued in the text. Based on this account, it can be argued that when writing her SCS and GP assignments, Luana has made informed choices to include specific textual features into her essays, but she did not possibly consider possible variation in writing across academic fields. Subsequently, as she was not aware of any disciplinary differences and specific expectations of her academic tutors, she wrote her assignments having a more general audience in mind and did not pay attention to any possible divergences in academic conventions. These observations are in line with the feedback she received for her essays. The observations do not, however, fully explain how she managed to respond to the SCS tutor expectations of presenting a powerful argument, and what made her overlook the requirements of presenting precise factual information in her GP essay. The account below aims to shed some light on these issues.

Luana's explanation of how she understands academic writing, described earlier, might have given a misleading impression that while working on her essays she simply applied general conventions that she was aware of into the writing of her disciplinary assignments. However, in her interviews she revealed that while preparing her assignments, she first started with the SCS essay and in fact she struggled for weeks with developing a text that presented her intended ideas and emphasised the points she regarded as important. She insisted that achieving a textual representation of her position reflecting her conviction and knowledge was particularly important to her as she felt that Socio-Cultural Studies was *her* field. She explained that in her previous degrees she studied Anthropology, Sociology and Fashion. Her subsequent identification with the SCS module made her feel somewhat more responsible for presenting a strong argument. She compiled her first draft of the SCS essay well in advance and she sought her writing tutor's opinion on her text. The feedback that she received on her draft was rather harsh and indicated that the writing tutor could not *understand* and *follow* her argument, due to problems, as the tutor explained, with her text structure. She was repeatedly told to *restructure* the text. After a few attempts and with tutor's continuous insistence on her just *rearranging* her ideas, Luana was unable to produce a text that she was pleased with and, therefore, saw no other way to progress but to seek help from somebody else. She reached out to her friend who was studying on a graduate level course at a university. Her friend rather than insisting on the structure advised her to re-engage with ideas and attempt to produce a conceptual map. Working together, they *threw out* her initial drafts and proceeded to engage with the topic while mapping the ideas on paper. Figure 7.1 shows the end result of their intellectual endeavour, and the interview extract that follows the figure offers Luana's account of their combined effort:

Figure 7.1 Luana's SCS essay mind-map



What she did was, 'Okay, let's see the question: 'How valid is the distinction made, often made between sex and gender?'' And she said, 'Okay, so this talks about social construction and biological fact.' So, she meant like the question, and she put two branches: biological fact, social construction.... And then she said, 'Okay, what do you say about biological fact? What is different?' And I start just brainstorming all the ideas, and she wrote. And she said, 'Okay, now what about social construct?' and brainstorm again and just write. And she said, 'Okay, now we have to find examples for that, bibliography for that, and then your conclusion is going to be... so, there is a distinction or not?' And we wrote that... actually we wrote then it was the opposite of what I said here. ... I said that it was... yeah, there is a distinction. But then, because of my readings and my references, I realised that it was no, there is no distinction, you know. ... Because I focused more on that everything's social constructed. ... So what she did was that, you know, really, you know, she mapped these questions specifically. (258-277/II)

Luana's account illustrates her deeper level of engagement with the essay question rather than just using a template of essay structure that she could translate her ideas into. With her friend, she first unpacked the essay question, and then engaged in brainstorming ideas for each of the key terms: 'sex as a biological fact' and 'gender as a social construction'. Luana was guided by her friend to closely engage with each of the two focal concepts and come up with specific examples to further support her ideas. Then, based on that work, she was prompted to decide what her position was on the topic: *so, there is a distinction or not?* Luana then made her choice, which later while writing she actually changed based on her further exploration of the topic. Luana mentioned in the interview that developing this conceptual map helped her to see relationships between ideas, meaning *how the ideas connect to each other* (402/II), *how you make these connections and in which order* (405/II). She further explained that in writing classes the students would normally be advised to start with an outline, but in her view *outline is more complex than just brain mapping* (376-377/II) because *sometimes the ideas you put in an order which doesn't match it well* (385-386/II). In other words, Luana explained that writing is about working with ideas, and that it is not just a technical skill or for example filling in an outline with points that the essay should cover.

Even though in the extracts quoted above, Luana did not articulate any explicit awareness about different writing requirements across disciplinary fields, what emerges from this account is that she was not satisfied with working on her SCS assignment by engaging in continuous restructuring of the text. By identifying herself as an insider of academic fields related to the Socio-Cultural Studies, she consistently worked towards producing a text that she would be pleased with, that would articulate her position and satisfy her feeling of *responsibility* to offer *something more* than just a simple answer. While explaining how she worked with her friend on the sex and gender essay, Luana made a further comment that in the writing classes the students are given examples of other essays from other areas; however, in her experience, working with some general examples makes it challenging later when she is writing for her academic modules. She said: *They give you examples of other questions, of other subjects and, you know... I don't know, sometimes it's difficult to relate to, you know, and it takes you a bit of time to get it, yeah.* (278-281/II) This resonates with what Lea and Street (1998) argue that students were able to 'assimilate this general



advice on writing 'techniques' and 'skills' but found it difficult to move from general to using this advice in a particular text in a particular disciplinary context' (p. 164). Luana eventually credited her achievement in essay writing to her creativity, rather than explicitly attributing it to the advice given in the writing class:

*I'm very creative, you know, I'm a very creative person, so in all the criteria which they ask us to fulfil I was able to be creative, like using the sources in a creative way, so like mixing the information from different books in a way which was, I was able to, you know, to develop the idea which I was, you know. Like if you're creative it's easier for you. (306-310/III)*

When I enquired how she worked on her Global Politics essay, she explained that she *did the same*, meaning that she worked with a mind-map and *kept it near her computer* while writing. She felt less responsibility when writing her GP essay. She explained that it was not her field, and that her knowledge came only from the lectures. This statement of hers also resonates with Lea and Street's (1998) findings that students often apply their understanding of academic subjects and ways of writing in these subjects into other courses that they are less familiar with. When that is the case, they often receive less favourable feedback on their writing. As discussed earlier, this has been also Luana's experience who was praised for an *ambitious* piece of work in her SCS, but who was given feedback in GP explaining the difference between a *good* and *excellent* essay.

### 7.3 Natasha's essay writing

In this section I investigate another example of how a student's apparent familiarity with general essay writing conventions was not sufficient in meeting academic tutors' discipline specific expectations. My exploration focuses on two essays written by Natasha for the same modules and in the same academic term as Luana. Natasha chose to write her assignments for different topics; her essays discussed issues related to societal organisation as well as to political and economic power of international governments. Her SCS assignment required from Natasha to explore the validity of a hierarchical model of organisation in modern institutions. The GP essay was to be a discussion of the international status of the European Union in relation to its political and economic power. Specific essay titles and additional documentary data offered by Natasha with the copies of her texts are stipulated in Table 7.2:

**Table 7.2 Natasha's essays: topic choices and gathered data**

Academic module	Essay title	Additional documents
<b>Socio-Cultural Studies</b> (compulsory)	<i>Many institutions still use a hierarchical system of organization. Is this model outmoded or is it still valid in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?</i>	Feedback sheet and marginalia
<b>Global Politics</b> (elective)	<i>In much of the literature, the EU is depicted as an economic giant, but a political dwarf. Do you deem this to be an accurate description of the status of the EU in international politics? Discuss your answer</i>	Feedback sheet and marginalia

In both essays, Natasha demonstrated a potential of being able to engage with disciplinary knowledge and to offer a discussion drawing on a wide range of sources. She was able to produce a text that, on a surface level, included all the features of a well-written essay. However, her ability to organise textual material did not translate into a convincing persuasive prose. For example, even though in her SCS assignment the textual structure and organisation were viewed by the tutor as suitable for the assignment type, this in itself has proven to be insufficient for Natasha in being able to present a plausible argument. Similarly, in her GP essay her initial paragraphs were regarded as *very clear*, but as the text progressed the tutor could not see the relevance of her carefully supported arguments to the central proposition of her essay. In her interviews, Natasha explained that the writing of her assignments was informed by her extensive reading and that writing classes *were general about the essay* (232/I) rather than offering more specific support for her assignment writing. Even though working on her texts Natasha engaged with the subject content through the reading of wide-ranging sources, this did not appear to have resulted in her presenting arguments that met tutors' expectations. Subsequently, both of her essays, in SCS and GP, were awarded a C+. In the sections that follow, attempting to understand Natasha's essay writing experience, I will explore the textual features of Natasha's assignments, tutors' comments on her engagement with the disciplinary content, and finally, I will also refer to Natasha's interview accounts. In my analysis, my focus is on tutors' and Natasha's emic perspectives on what is viewed as helpful in meeting the demands of assessment.

### 7.3.1 *I was expecting something more from this essay* - tutors' comments

Natasha received largely positive comments on the textual organisation of her essays. Even though her SCS tutor did not make any explicit annotations on the margins of her assignment regarding the textual features of her work, in the feedback sheet attached to the essay, he signalled that the clarity of organization and structure were *good*. In her GP essay, on the other hand, the tutor did annotate some parts of her text making comments on its overall development. Specifically, he marked her introductory paragraph as well written; he also commented on the third paragraph as being the most successfully presented. It was only towards the end of the essay that the GP tutor's comments became less favourable stating that the text had become *descriptive* and *lacking cohesion*. The overall comments offered on the textual organisation of both her essays were worded using general descriptive terms and did not seem to justify her C+ grade. In order to gain some understanding of how Natasha wrote her essays and which features of her writing might have steered the tutors to give her a lower grade, I analysed the texts using the same 'hidden features' used while working with Luana's essays. Namely, I paid attention to the argumentative essay structure and to the rhetorical devices that help to create links between ideas, provide support from academic literature and indicate author's position on the propositional meaning. In my analysis I also attended to tutors' comments on the margins of her texts and in the feedback sheets.

Upon a close reading of both of Natasha's essays, it became apparent that her two assignments were structurally very similar. Each of the essays comprised nine paragraphs, and was clearly divided into the thesis, argument and conclusions stage (Hyland, 1990). The thesis stage in Natasha's texts included one paragraph, which outlined the context of a given topic ('information move'), presented her position ('proposition move') and gave indication of how the essay will develop ('marker move'). The argument stage of each of her essays comprised eight paragraphs. Each paragraph presented a central idea ('claim move') with supporting evidence ('support move'). In the argument stage, even though all the paragraphs were consistently structured, that part of Natasha's texts appeared to be rather ineffective. I will illustrate this later while discussing specific paragraphs excerpted from her texts. Both of her assignments ended with a clearly marked concluding stage, in which she consolidated

her claims ('consolidation move'), and offered either an affirmation of her position ('affirmation move') as in the SCS essay, or rounded off her discussion by widening the perspective of her proposition ('close move') as in the GP essay. Apart from attending to larger elements of textual structure, Natasha in her essay employed a variety of rhetorical devices to ensure that the stages in her argument were signalled to the readers ('frame markers') and that the links between the ideas were indicated ('transitions'). In both of her essays she presented herself as a credible author drawing on a variety of sources ('evidentials') and at times signalling her position by hedging her statements ('hedges'). Both her Global Politics essay and her Socio-Cultural Studies essay, marked with analytical notes, are included in Appendices 7.4 and 7.5 respectively. In the sections that follow I will illustrate the key points that emerged from the analysis of her texts. I will specifically discuss three paragraphs excerpted from her GP essay and one from her SCS essay.

One insight that emerged from the textual analysis is that the tutors seem to have recognised Natasha's ability to structure the text. For example, Natasha's introduction from her GP essay was commented on by the tutor as offering *good introduction*. Extract 4 quotes that introductory paragraph:

Extract 4 – Natasha's GP essay: paragraph 1

- 1 If we look at a map of the world from the west coast of Ireland to the east of the
- 2 Mediterranean, we can find the 'Eurozone' which consolidates 27 countries and represents
- 3 the European Union. Almost 500 million citizens from different countries share borders and
- 4 are linked with another part of world such as biggest partner in politics and economics. The
- 5 supranational organization as a whole has a bigger influence on the world stage than any
- 6 single countries. **However, sometimes there is a doubt** about the EU power **and** there is an
- 7 idea that the union represents an economic giant but a political dwarf. I do not agree with
- 8 this position, **because** the EU achieved a lot in political and diplomatic world issues. **Also**,
- 9 transformative economic help has a huge influence on developing countries and a decisive
- 10 effect in difficult circumstances [**information move**]. **This essay will examine** how actions
- 11 of the EU bring its political power [**proposition move**]. I **will begin** by explaining the
- 12 principle of organisation, will have a look at the international politics, will analyse the
- 13 military issues in old and recent examples, **and** will consider the crisis situation in Greece
- 14 [**marker move**].

This paragraph opens the Global Politics essay. Natasha carefully structured the paragraph following three rhetorical moves. She first makes 'an information move' and provides the background for her discussion (lines 1-10). Then, she explicitly announces the aim that her essay hopes to fulfil thereby presenting her proposition (lines 10-11). She writes: *This essay will examine how actions of the EU bring its*

*political power*. In the remaining part of the paragraph (lines 11-13), Natasha identifies a list of issues she is going to cover in her text, and as such makes the 'marker' move of the thesis stage. Additionally, she uses 'transitions' to establish links between the ideas, for example: *however* (line 6), *and* (lines 6 and 13), *because* (line 8), *also* (line 8). Moreover, when introducing her proposition, she explicitly signals her 'discourse goal' by using a 'frame marker': *this essay will examine* (line 10), and then by adding another 'frame marker' *will begin* (line 11) to signal how the content of the essay will develop. Additionally, she attempts to hedge some of her statements (line 6). Inferring from the tutor's remark, he recognised such textual organisation as *good*. The tutor annotated the last sentence of the introduction offering specific comments; he wrote: *your argument is clearly outlined, even though I would have liked more clarity about the steps by which you intend to reach your conclusion (for example: what do you mean by 'the principle of organisation'?)*. This comment offers an additional insight: it reveals that even though the introduction presents a clear outline to the essay, it could have given a more explicit indication of how the student will argue her position and eventually arrive at a conclusion. In other words, explicitness seems to be an important feature in the GP writing. Extract 5, quoted below, is helpful in shedding light on what explicitness in the GP assignment may mean. The following excerpt from Natasha's assignment has been annotated by the tutor as *the best paragraph* in her essay:

Extract 5 – Natasha's GP essay: paragraph 4

1 **The second** example of the EU political power we **can** find in the EU decision-making group,  
 2 who are thinking globally and have an influence on non-European nations in  
 3 economic or political policies [**claim move**]. The strategic decision for the EU is to have  
 4 wider authority borders via economic assistance where in some cases economic help is  
 5 urgent. For many developing countries the EU symbolizes important international actor  
 6 (**Karin; Dickson 2004**). The EU develops essential regional relationships with Africa,  
 7 Caribbean and Pacific (79 countries). There the relation with the EU is a question of vital  
 8 importance and a significant example. In the development cooperation programme are  
 9 combinations of aid, trade and politics cooperation. Where, the political conditionality is  
 10 main instrument for the EU and connects economic aid to political conditions  
 11 (**EW.08.03.10**). From 1975 the development cooperation policy with Lome Conventions  
 12 from EEC realizes the New International Economic Order (**Karin; Dickson 2004**). The  
 13 Cotonou Agreement, the most influential trade and aid agreement ever concluded between  
 14 developed and developing countries (**2000**). Financial support from the European  
 15 Development Fund to ACP is around three billion euro a year (**<http://europa.eu>**) [**support**  
 16 **move**].

This paragraph is the fourth in Natasha's essay and makes up part of her argument stage. It starts with a clear frame marker: *the second* (line 1), which signals the introduction of the claim: *example of the EU political power ...* (lines 1-3). Natasha seems to hedge her claim by using a modal verb *can* (line 1). The larger part of the paragraph (lines 3-15) constitutes the support for the initial claim. The supporting sentences include five 'evidentials', i.e. direct reference to sources (lines 6, 11, 12, 14, 15). The paragraph appears to have no explicit rhetorical devices that indicate the relationships between the ideas. There are also no 'hedges' in the supporting section of her text. The strength of this paragraph, however, lies in its clear claim which explicitly refers to the central proposition of the essay. Additionally, the support offered in the paragraph is very factual and, judging from the fact that the tutor did not annotate any of pieces of information as incorrect, the support gives very accurate details. In other words, it can be said that this paragraph is very explicit, precise and factual and therefore has been recognized by the tutor as *the best* of Natasha's GP essay.

The textual features described in relation to Natasha's writing in her Global Politics module can also be found in her Socio-Cultural Studies essay. Her introduction in the SCS assignment comprises the same moves, and her paragraphs in the argument stage also mirror the neat move pattern found in her GP essay. However, even though Natasha's ability to develop structured academic prose is clearly evidenced in her texts, her essays were commented on as presenting, in some sections, claims that were regarded by the tutors as extraneous and unrelated to the essay question. In the case of the GP tutor, this even made him question the overall cohesion of Natasha's essay. Towards the end of her essay the tutor made the following comment: *This part is a bit too descriptive. Moreover, I have a feeling that this essay lacks cohesion.* Extract 6 quotes the paragraph to which tutor's comment was attached:

Extract 6 – Natasha's GP essay: paragraph 8

1 **The new** challenge for the EU is the recent financial crisis in Greece [**claim move**]. From  
2 **BBC news** the new package of requests from Greece government was welcomed by the EU  
3 and the International Monetary Fund, but condemned by Greek trade unions. The more  
4 important issue is that the EU had called for austerity measures amid fears that Greece's  
5 problems *could* undermine the eurozone. As the President of EC Jose **Manuel Barroso** said,  
6 the plan for cutting financial deficit "*takes all necessary measures*". The **International**  
7 **Monetary Fund** called it a "**very strong package**" and Mr Papandreou is due to meet  
8 German Chancellor in Berlin (**BBC 03.03.10**). Centralized power in the EU is constrained  
9 by the principle of subsidiarity. From 1970 the harmonization of bank regulation started to  
10 take place in the EU and '*the member countries retain sovereignty and the safety net is*  
11 *provided entirely by member states*' (Garcia; Nieto 2005) [**support move**].

In this paragraph Natasha makes two rhetorical moves. First, she signals the introduction of another claim ('claim move') with the frame marker *the new* (line 1); then, she states what her claim is: *challenge for the EU is the recent financial crisis in Greece* (line 1). Finally, she offers support for her claim ('support move', lines 1-11) bringing evidence from a BBC news report (lines 1-8), quoting the President of the EC (lines 5-6), the International Monetary Fund (lines 6-7), and introducing a direct quote from a source (lines 10-11). She also attempts to hedge one of her statements by using a modal verb *could* (line 5). Even though the paragraph appears to have all the necessary rhetorical moves and some rhetorical devices aiming at showing her knowledgeability, the central claim of this paragraph is formulated rather implicitly. It does not directly state what the relevance is of *the recent financial crisis in Greece* (line 1) to the central proposition of the essay, i.e. to the political strength of the European Union. The evidence that Natasha provides also does not make explicit the connection between the actions taken by the EU and its political strength. The preceding paragraph in this essay (see Appendix 7.4, paragraph 7) is equally implicit. It provides an example the EU actions with regard to the crisis in Georgia without explaining the significance of that example to the overall argument. It can be claimed, therefore, that it is because Natasha fails to make her claims explicit, the tutor does not recognize her paragraphs as having a part in her argumentation, and he marks that part of her essay as *descriptive*. Being unable to notice Natasha's attempts at argumentation, he conceptualizes issues with her writing as being related to some more general writing ability and comments that *he has a feeling that the essay lacks cohesion*. The tutor sheds a bit more light on this in his final feedback note on the essay:

*The way in which you use all the information at your disposal has to be improved, because there are some parts of your essay whose relevance to your argument I fail to see.*

By doing that the tutor not only questions her ability to develop an argument, but also does not recognize the knowledge demonstrated by Natasha as relevant or valid.

Natasha's SCS essay presents somewhat similar issues as those described with relation to her GP essay illustrated in extract 6 earlier. The SCS tutor did not offer any comments on the textual organization on the margins of her assignment; however, he made sundry annotations on the on the relevance of her claims to the central proposition of her essay. The topic Natasha chose for her CSC essay required her to discuss the validity of hierarchy as an organizational system in modern institutions in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, in her essay Natasha steers away from the concept of hierarchy and debates the notions of social class, racism and social injustice. Extract 7 offers an illustration:

Extract 7 – Natasha's SCS essay: paragraph 6

1 **Moving to** other forms of social divisions besides class, different sociological labels such as  
2 male or female, rich or poor, black or white immediately appear [**claim move**]. Here  
3 hierarchy has another face, which **can** be unfair and oppressive. Gender, age and ethnicity  
4 make a picture of social variety. **On the one hand** the issue of inequalities between groups  
5 depends on the perceptions and attitude of people and **on the other hand** it is based on the  
6 business hierarchical system. **According to Payne (2006)** a person's position in a society,  
7 ethnicity, his or her age and education, employment and income are crucial attributes.  
8 **Moreover**, when employment positions are different, then for various levels there is a  
9 different relationship with the employer, based on salary and status. In an organization or  
10 society, when one level is better positioned and stronger than another one, it subsequently  
11 has more influence and power than a worse located and feeble (**Payne 2006**) one.  
12 **Additionally**, movement from one position to another is not easy and sometimes it is  
13 impossible. For instance, for centuries in Hindu India it was impossible, because of the caste  
14 system. If somebody is born in a low and poor family it is out of the question that he or she  
15 **can** change position or public image (**CTS 21.01.10.**). Even though it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the  
16 rules there are still inviolable [**support move**].

This paragraph presents a well-structured piece of text, with a formulated claim (lines 1-2) and elaborated support (lines 2-16) which is substantiated by reference to sources (lines 6, 11, 15). Additionally, the paragraph opens with a 'frame marker' (line 1) indicating a rhetorical move to another topic; the relationships between the ideas in the texts are signaled by various transitions (lines 4, 5, 8, 12) and the writer signals her position by occasional use of hedges (lines 3 and 15). It seems that the organizational side of writing has been well covered by Natasha. The issue with this paragraph lies in the fact that its content is largely irrelevant to the essay question. Natasha discusses



various *social divisions*, for instance *sociological labels such as male or female, rich or poor, black or white* (lines 1-2). These concepts are not related to the topic of the essay, i.e. hierarchical system of organization, therefore the discussion she presents is beyond the scope of the essay question. The SCS tutor comments on this paragraph stating that:

*None of these divisions is intrinsically hierarchical: you have now moved onto talking about differences in status and social inequalities, which do not necessarily follow a hierarchical organization.*

Based on the analytical accounts presented with regard to extracts 6 and 7, it can be argued that textual organization in itself is not sufficient to satisfy the demands of written assessment. From these two extracts, it can be further inferred that even in-depth knowledge in some area, meticulously referred to in the text, does not necessarily guarantee that the assignment will be well received. The focus on textual features will help the student to construct a well-written text; however, this will not lead to the argument being recognized as valid. I will elaborate on this issue below when engaging more closely with the tutor's commentaries on the propositional content of Natasha's essays.

While commenting on Natasha's SCS essay, the tutor's main critique was that she misunderstood the key term in the essay question, namely 'hierarchy'. The tutor notices that Natasha offers a binding definition of that term in her essay, but then fails to apply it to her discussion. Natasha's definition given in the second paragraph of her text reads as follows: *In general, in hierarchical model there are lots of different levels of classes where everyone has their own place.* The tutor annotates this definition with a comment: *This is a good definition of hierarchical system, but you seem to forget about it later in the essay.* The tutor makes sixteen annotations on Natasha's essay challenging her arguments and trying to explain that she confused *social class* and *social inequalities* with the notion of hierarchy. The tutor's annotations are synthesised in his commentary included in the feedback sheet:

*Although the definition of hierarchy that you give towards the beginning of your essay is correct, you go on to ignore it and talk about all class distinctions, and instances of inequality and discrimination as intrinsically hierarchical. This is not what the word means and this misunderstanding means that you do not address the question set.*

The tutor's commentary states that Natasha's essay does not offer a valid response to the topic given in the assignment question. This is due to her misinterpretation of the key term and subsequent focus on *class distinctions* rather than *hierarchy*. Based on the analysis of her essay and inferring from the feedback, it can be argued that a text which refers to a wide-range of sources and which presents an intelligible text with a well-structured introduction, paragraphs, conclusions and using a variety of rhetorical devices does not in itself meet the demands of assessment. In other words, the *non-content material* as the SCS tutor called it in the interviews (see Chapter 5, extract 12) taught in the writing classes appears to be of much less importance than the overall expectation of presenting a valid discussion based on student understanding of disciplinary content. In fact, it seems that it is the subject content, debated and presented with sound, valid and compelling arguments that gives validation to and recognition of student ability to engage with academic writing.

Similar issues have emerged from the analytical reading of Natasha's GP essay accompanied by attending to tutor's annotations and feedback. In contrast to her SCS essay, when writing for GP, Natasha stayed within the scope of the essay question. However, the information that she used to support her claims was often viewed as imprecise and too general. This was also the case with Luana's GP essay, discussed earlier in this chapter. In Natasha's essay, the GP tutor made similar comments on the precision of factual information. For example, in her essay Natasha refers to the European Union as 'Eurozone' (paragraph 1); the tutor annotated that saying: *This is inaccuracy. We call 'Eurozone' only that part of the EU that has adopted the Euro as its currency.* In another example, Natasha describes the EU as a 'supranational organisation' (paragraph 1); the tutor challenges such characterisation: *We have been discussing this aspect during the whole year: are you sure that the EU is a supranational organisation?* In a later section of her essay, Natasha discusses the EU political standards as evidence of its power (paragraph 3). The tutor annotates her discussion as drawing on overgeneralised statements, and he points out that the EU has not been consistent in its standards in particular with regard to the international affairs. The tutor sums up his annotations in a final comment included on the feedback sheet:

*If I have to be honest, I was expecting something more from this essay. The argument that you want to express goes against the mainstream in the literature, and this is certainly valuable. Moreover, you support it referring to an extensive range of sources. However, there are some basic factual inaccuracies that would cost you a lot in a Masters program.*

The tutor's comments imply that attempting to make an original argument and drawing on variety of sources is not sufficient in writing in political science. He implies the need to be precise and to present the information with attention to the factual detail and in a manner specific to a particular disciplinary field. If a student fails to respond to this requirement, if the text is not written responding to these disciplinary requirements, the writing is not recognised as meeting the expected standards.

Drawing on the textual analysis and analytical reading of Natasha's essays, it can be stated that even though Natasha demonstrated familiarity with essay conventions, which was recognised to a large extent by her tutors, and even though she demonstrated a disposition to engage with scholarly content and ability to draw on a variety of sources, she failed to meet specific demands of written assessment in her academic modules. In her SCS she failed to address the essay question, and in the GP assignment the information she presented was implicit, imprecise and too general. These features left her tutors *expecting something more* from her essays, and subsequently have had an impact on her achieving low grades and made her essays. In the next section I will supplement the account offered in this section by presenting Natasha's comments on her essay writing experience.

### **7.3.2 I'm not happy - Natasha's comments**

Attempting to explore further what assisted Natasha in constructing her essays in Socio-Cultural Studies and in Global Politics, I investigate issues that emerged from her interviews in relation to the writing experience. In her accounts, Natasha revealed a number of assumptions and understandings that guided her through the writing of her assignments. She showed the understanding of textual structure, awareness of diverse requirements across disciplinary fields, and she indicated that, in her view, reading is of key importance to writing. I will discuss these issues in more detail below.

Natasha, similarly to Luana, demonstrated a great deal of comprehension with regard to text structure. Natasha regarded academic essay as structured according to strict

rules. While discussing that element of working on her assignments, she indicated that in essay writing *you have to show structure* (124/II), *you have to have clear introduction, you have to have your opinion* (147/III), *you have to make it interesting* (150/III), and also that *you have to support your ideas every time* (124/II) and *show link between the information* (361/I). It seems from her statements that just like Luana, Natasha internalised the ways of describing what makes an essay. She uses similar general descriptors employed by the tutors in their annotations and feedback notes and also in their interviews when discussing student writing (see Chapter 5). Additionally, as evidenced in the preceding section devoted to the analysis of her written texts, Natasha's understanding of textual structure was not only theoretical but also practical. She made an effort to include, in both her essays, the textual features of an essay that she discussed in the interviews. This could indicate that while writing, she was able to make informed choices of how to develop her texts, and that she was aware of the need to present a well-structured essay.

Even though Natasha showed ability to construct a well-written essay, she indicated in her interviews that the knowledge and understanding she received in the writing classes was very useful but rather *general* (232/I), and that it was not directly related to the writing required from her in her academic modules. She commented that the support offered in the writing classes was not '*particular in [her] topics*' (233/I) meaning topics chosen by her for the SCS and GP assignments. Apart from that, Natasha showed awareness that specific writing requirements in these two modules are in fact different from one another. She explained that *Global Politics is more specific ... it's like history* (236-238/I); whereas, in Socio-Cultural Studies the emphasis is on being able to present an interesting discussion on a given topic. In her other interview, she explained the differences in a more detailed account:

*For SCS you are more open to have your opinions because maybe you agree or disagree with someone. There is no rules, you know, there is your perception about something. But, in Global Politics, you can't say that there is ... that European Union is for instance multicultural or institutional maybe, you have to be more ... how to say, more correct, and more specific if you want, of course, a good score. (85-90/III)*

It can be inferred from her words that Natasha can clearly articulate differences in particular ways of constructing knowledge in these two subject areas. She explains that the writing in GP emphasises specificity and precision; whereas, writing in the

SCS is more oriented towards debating ideas. Natasha's understanding of these differences coupled with her command of textual organisation does not seem to provide an answer as to why she was not able to construct texts that would be awarded higher grades than C+. As discussed earlier, in her SCS assignment she steered away from the main topic and discussed social class rather than hierarchy, and in her GP essay she lacked precision and accuracy in her statements. I will address this mismatch between her understandings and her actual writing performance below.

When asked about her conception of what makes academic writing, Natasha explained:

*Well, academic writing? Is your opinions based – can I say – based on difference literature sources and academic sources, it's not just someone that thinks this way. (369-472/II)*

In her interviews when discussing her assignments, Natasha emphasised the importance of reading and being able to engage with a variety of sources. She considered writing as process of mediating ideas and opinions through written text. For that reason, the key element of her approach to writing consisted of extensive reading. The quote below illustrates how she engaged with reading:

*For my essays what I'm doing – and it helps me, I don't know if it's right or not – when I read something in books or in internet sources I, what I like, I have one folder collect, when I collect information, and next I try paraphrase or summarise or suchlike, yes, because it is much easier then you have one document, than ten books and 20 articles. It is really good for me, I don't know, it works for me. Every time I copy-paste, copy-paste and next I can read and makes cut, cut, cut and I have my [materials]. (362-367/II)*

It appears from Natasha's account that her reading technique was much organised: she had a folder in which she would accumulate extracts that she considered relevant to her written assignments and which she found either in books or on-line. She would initially just *copy* and *paste*, and then she tried to *paraphrase* or *summarise* the sources. In other words, her reading was a process of *collecting information* rather than actively working with ideas and trying to establish explicit links helpful in presenting a convincing argument. In her interviews, Natasha emphasised the importance of reading in the writing process. For example, she would say: '*You have to read a lot, see. Without reading you can't write* (325/III). However, she had more

difficulty in explaining how reading informed her writing. As the earlier analysis of her essays indicates, Natasha did demonstrate that she was able to draw on variety of sources in her writing, but nonetheless she did not present strong arguments in either of her essays. When asked about her SCS essay, in which she misinterpreted the essay question, Natasha responded:

*My problem was even though I feel more comfortable with this topic, I was just ... because I answer in this question however I bring another aspect and I spend more time speaking about another aspect than focusing in the first general question. It was my problem that I read a lot, more than first term, but I'm not happy with this ...However it is hopeless, I made mistakes there, it's my fault. (185-190/II)*

As she explained, she *read a lot* while preparing to write the SCS essay, and additionally she enjoyed the topic; however, she seemed to have read too widely and subsequently focusing in her writing on *bringing another aspect* to the topic rather than engaging with essay question and *focusing* on what the topic required. She admits that she made a *mistake*. A similar issue occurred with her GP essay, for which her reading was not focused, and therefore as she said in *Global Politics*, *there was a huge mistake about some definitions* (216-217/II) which resulted in her giving either incorrect or imprecise information in her essay. She explains that in her writing and in her reading she needs to pay more attention to the actual issues that are required in essay titles: *I need more focus in topic and I know what my problem was* (211/II).

Drawing on insights that emerged from Natasha's interview accounts, it can be argued that her familiarity with essay writing conventions and her understanding of requirements was not sufficient in assisting her in responding to the demands of assessment. Even though she made a considerable attempt to engage with given subject content through extensive reading, her reading was not focused which eventually made her feel *hopeless* and *unhappy* about her writing experience and prevented her from responding adequately to essay questions and to the specific expectations of her academic tutors.

## 7.4 Summary of findings

In this chapter I engaged in the analysis of student essays written for different academic modules. My aim was to explore how students construct the answers to essay questions and whether they meet the expectations of their academic tutors who assess their work. In my analytical work I drew on 'hidden features' framework (Street, 2009) operationalised by reference to an argumentative essay structure (Hyland, 1990) and rhetorical devices for mediating meaning in the text (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Nunan, 1993). I also engaged in analytical reading of students' texts while attending to tutors' annotations and to feedback comments. Such an approach helped me to combine focus on the text with focus on specific conventions that are characteristic of academic prose and that tutors look for when they evaluate students' writing. Additionally, in order to obtain more insight into how students approached the task of their essay writing, I referred to students' interview accounts.

The analysis indicates that both Luana and Natasha were able to construct well-written texts, in terms of structural organisation and the use of rhetorical devices, such as frame markers, transitions, evidentials, hedges and demonstrative reference. However, both students indicated that the writing of the essays was not a simple matter of applying what they had learnt in the writing classes into their disciplinary writing. Luana indicated that relating examples given in the writing classes to their disciplinary writing was difficult. Natasha stated that the writing classes gave a *general* foundation but did not help with the specific demands of essay questions. Students' interview accounts revealed that when working on their texts, both Natasha and Luana engaged in a complex intellectual process of working with disciplinary concepts (for example, Luana's mind-mapping approach) and engaging with wide reading in and around given essay topics (as in Natasha's experience). Regardless of their deep engagement, the students proved to be less able to meet specific disciplinary demands of academic conventions. It appears, from the analysis, that only Luana in her SCS essay managed to respond to tutor expectations. This can be due to the fact that she was familiar, from her previous educational experience, with the expected conventions. Interestingly, even though Natasha appears to have been aware of academic tutors' expectations, she was not able to respond to them in her writing.

The findings described above also indicate that students when they approach the task of essay writing spend a significant amount of time engaging with the disciplinary content (through conceptual discussion or reading), and only then they attempt to construct the texts. This student engagement extends the perspective offered in the Academic Literacies approach literature, which so far focused on tutor expectations, students' understandings of requirements (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999), and issues of explicitly articulating what writing requirements are (Lillis, 2001; Street, 2009). The data presented here appears to indicate that a written text emerges as a fusion of various types of intellectual engagement with constructing knowledge, prior to actually writing the text down as a part of assessment. This finding was also evident in the student interview data discussed in the preceding chapter.

Another finding that resulted from the analysis of Luana's and Natasha's work is that academic tutors use only general descriptors, such as *good introduction*, *very clear* or *lack cohesion*, while making comments on students' textual development. This confirms what Lea and Street (1998) claim that tutors use general descriptors to comments on student writing. It seems, however, that in some cases in the data presented in this chapter the tutors were able to point to some more nuanced discipline specific expectations and offer quite helpful comments that indicate what is actually expected and required in student writing. For example, the GP tutor was able to comment on the lack of precision or factual correctness of the information in student writing.

Finally, another point that I would like to highlight is that the analysis focused on the textual features and the analysis which attends to tutor feedback commentary yield different perspectives on student achievement. As evident from the discussion presented in this chapter, a text can be 'well-structured', but it can still fail to meet specific demands of disciplinary writing. This finding sheds lights on the writing support offered to students in the writing classes (see Chapter 4) and emphasises that the focus on the text itself may not be sufficient in preparing students for academic writing across the disciplinary modules. This finding seems to have direct implications for pedagogic practice and for developing ways of rethinking writing support, issues that I will take up in the next chapter.



## Chapter 8 - Concluding comments

*I don't know what exactly [academic tutors are] looking for, and I think that's a huge weakness of the [PMP] course, because I sometimes feel as if we have to, kind of, teach generic academic writing and hope that the students can, kind of, tailor their writing towards those specific areas. ... I don't think it's good at all.*

*Peter, writing tutor (74-79/III)*

*So, the point is to put together and to see the different theories of an author on a certain point from a critical point of view ... [the students] have to show that really they understand critically the topic and [are] able to identify the main ... shortcomings, the advantages [and] the disadvantages.*

*Domenico, academic tutor (220-225)*

*I had to read a lot ... in order to have a general idea what I'm going to write about...But it was a kind of process, reading [and also discussing with colleagues] about these topics: it took lots of time, but after that it was much easier when we knew how we wanted to structure or what we wanted to write about.*

*Ronnie, student writer (223-233/I)*

### 8.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to investigate institutional writing support in higher education in the UK. It aimed to explore what is involved in the teaching and learning of academic writing, taking account of the perspectives and practices of writing tutors who offer support, academic tutors who assess student writing and student-writers who attempt to learn writing conventions and to respond to the demands of written assessment. From a theoretical perspective, the research presented was located in the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 2004) and was informed by the views of language and literacy conceptualised as social practice (Barton, et al., 2000; Gee, 2008; Street, 1984). Methodologically, it shared the 'ethnographic gaze' (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 10) of other studies on student writing support conducted in the Academic Literacies theoretical framework (e.g. Castanheira, et al., 2015; Gurlay & Deane, 2012; C. Jones, et al., 1999; Lillis, 2001, 2006). The study drew on multiple sources of data collected over a period of one academic year on a full-time Pre-Masters Programme which combines writing support and tuition in academic subjects in Social Sciences. It was motivated by the critique of mainstream writing support as focused on teaching generic writing skills with an assumption that students can transfer these

skills to the demands of writing across various academic fields (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001). The study was also motivated by the recognition that support options should include instruction in disciplinary writing and should assist students in understanding specific epistemological underpinnings of writing requirements (Lea, 2004; Street, 2009; Wingate, 2012b, 2015). Additionally, it was inspired by my practitioner's concerns and pedagogic curiosity. This theoretical, methodological and personal interest led to my main research question being formulated as follows:

*What can be learnt from currently offered institutional writing support and from students' own ways of approaching the task of assignment writing in their academic disciplines?*

Looking for an answer to this question, I posed four subsidiary research questions asking about: teaching of writing in support classes (RQ1), perspectives on student writing held by writing and academic tutors (RQ2), students' understanding of writing demands and their ways of approaching the requirements (RQ3), students' texts and tutors' appraisals of these texts (RQ4). With the goal of exploring issues included in my research questions, and as my doctoral study began to evolve, I adopted a stance of a 'learning researcher' (Heath, 2009, p. 13) and sought to gain distance from my practitioner's experience and from the findings of other researchers and pursued to engage with *emic perspectives* of my research participants (M. Harris, 1976). I have chosen to preface this chapter with three data quotes that, to a large extent, capture underlying concerns of writing support tutors, points of view of academic tutors, and experience of student writers as voiced by them in my study. My objective in this final chapter is to bring together those different trajectories that emerged from my ethnographic data and by doing so to '*amplify the voices*' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 97, added emphasis) of my research participants who generously shared with me their teaching and learning experience. The account offered here aims at providing answers to my research questions, and as such draws on the empirical findings reported in Chapters 4-7 and engages with the Academic Literacies literature on student writing support in higher education in the UK as presented in Chapters 1 and 2. I hope that the insights from my study will contribute to the on-going discussions

on how to re-think and re-invent institutional *ways with writing* support in UK higher education.

This chapter begins by revisiting my four subsidiary research questions and by synthesising the main findings that emerged from my research (Section 8.2). This is followed by a discussion related to my main research question (Section 8.3) and the statement of the contribution that my research makes to the field of student writing support (Section 8.4). Next, I outline some limitations of my work and offer suggestions for further empirical investigations (Section 8.5). The chapter and the thesis closes with some final remarks (Section 8.6).

## **8.2 Revisiting the research questions**

In this section I highlight key findings of my study and offer answers to my subsidiary research questions.

### **8.2.1 Research question 1**

*RQ1: What writing support is provided to students in writing support classes in order to prepare them for disciplinary requirements of writing in academic modules?*

From an analysis of the classroom observation data, presented in Chapter 4, it would appear that the writing support offered to students tends to be at a general level. It has to be pointed out, however, that even though the writing support does not include instruction in discipline specific writing conventions, the support extends beyond surface features of text and language to include rhetorical and social functions of textual features as well as elements of academic prose.

The focus on text, and in particular its structure, dominates the writing instruction in the support classes. The textual features that are discussed cover the main elements of essay structure, such as introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusions; additionally, rhetorical functions of these textual elements are included in the classroom teaching. In Peter's sessions (see Section 4.2.3), for instance, the students were reminded that the introduction needs to provide background and contextual information, clearly state the writer's position on a given topic, and also give an overview of how the text will

develop. The students were also sensitised to the social context of writing, and in particular to the concept of readership: *Tell the reader, me, what you are going to do, OK?* This inclusion of rhetorical and social aspects of writing instruction questions the critique offered in the Academic Literacies literature that the writing support is focused on most ‘common sense’ features of academic writing (Lillis, 2006, p. 32).

Apart from the textual structure, the writing classes pay considerable attention to language level work. This ranges from concern with grammatical correctness to the inclusion of some rhetorical devices helpful in composing intelligible academic prose. What is given more attention appears to be dependent on a given tutor. For example, in classes with Sue (see Section 4.2.2), it seemed that surface features of grammar, vocabulary and punctuation constitute a major part of the teaching focus: *Let’s look at the grammar, and then, let’s look whether it’s a good sentence or not.* In sessions with Peter, however, there was much less focus on the correctness of language use, but the emphasis was on how to use certain phrases to better convey the meaning and mediate to the reader the writer’s intention of how the text would develop and the writer’s position on a given issue. Such use of language marks a departure from the focus on surface features of grammar, vocabulary and punctuation to some focus on the meaning-making and elements of writing that are less obvious and constitute more ‘hidden’ features of academic prose (Street, 2009).

What transpired from the analysis, is that the subject specificity of writing does not seem to be taken into account in the teaching of writing. The disciplinary conventions of, for example: what counts as support, the length and explicitness of the overview given at the end of introduction have not been discussed or highlighted as potential points of variation in writing across the academic modules. The subject content was, at times, brought into the discussion, but as a way of providing background to general discussions on text structure. Moreover, it seems that tutors tend to separate familiarity with disciplinary content and ability to develop a text. For example, in classes with Tom (see Section 4.2.1) when discussing essay titles for the SCS module, the tutor stated: *I could probably make a structure for this question even though I don’t actually understand it.*

It is also interesting to observe that the academic literacy instruction offered in the writing classes mainly focused on writing and, for example, attention to reading was marginal. This is in a considerable contrast to student interview data, which I will discuss later and which indicates that reading plays a major role in student writing and in textual development. In writing classes only Peter paid attention to reading, and that was when students were working on a specific assignment, a critique of an academic article. When the focus of the writing classes was on essay writing, reading was hardly included as part of instruction.

Overall, in response to RQ1, it can be argued that my findings paint a brighter picture of writing support than that described in the Academic Literacies literature (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999, 2006). Even though my findings confirm, to some degree, the critique of mainstream writing support as offering generic support (Wingate, 2006), ‘divorced from’ (Hyland, 2002b, p. 390) disciplinary knowledge, my findings also illustrate that tutors do extend beyond the focus on surface level features of text and language and include rhetorical and social functions of textual structure and language use. This may indicate that there might be a need to revisit how current writing support is viewed both in the Academic Literacies literature and at the institutional level.

### **8.2.2 Research question 2**

*RQ2: How do writing tutors on the one hand and academic tutors on the other hand understand writing requirements and writing support?*

The response to that question has been formulated based on the analysis of the interview data with writing and academic tutors, as reported in Chapter 5. Drawing on the findings, I have come to the realisation that while there are similarities in the way both writing and academic tutors articulate issues related to writing requirements and writing support, their actual understanding of these matters seems to be considerably different.

Academic tutors tended to articulate their understanding of writing requirements with reference to textual structure, language use and engagement with ideas. They typically convey their understanding using rather general descriptors, such as *introduction*,

*relevant points* or *discussion*. When prompted to elaborate, they usually emphasise the need for *criticality* rather than *description*; however, the tutors do not seem to be able to explain what *a good critically aware case* might entail in their disciplines. These findings are congruent with what has been previously reported in the literature (e.g.: Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999). Moreover, in my study the academic tutors appear not to have an understanding of variations that exist across disciplines and suggest that the writing requirements are *just the criteria listed by college*, presumably similar across the different contexts. They also reveal the view that writing is a *non-content material* (in other words: separate from disciplinary knowledge) and that general writing support provided in separation from any disciplinary input constitutes a good ‘fit’ for subject specific writing. This is not surprising, taking into account that academic tutors themselves seem to be unable to articulate their understanding of writing requirements beyond a general level of description.

Writing tutors, similarly to the academic tutors when explaining their understanding of writing requirements, refer to text, language and ideas used to respond to a given essay question. They also verbalise their understanding using general descriptive expressions. However, what becomes apparent from the data analysis is that writing tutors are aware of differences in academic writing requirements amongst academic tutors and across academic fields. Sue, for instance, explained that academic tutors *interpret criteria in different ways and different disciplines interpret them in different ways*. Despite being aware of these differences, the writing tutors revealed that they do not have a working knowledge of what these differences are. As Peter said: *I don’t know what exactly that teacher [i.e. a given academic tutor] is looking for*. Writing tutors also strongly indicate that the support that they offer in writing classes is at the general level without any discipline specific input. This finding is rather astonishing as usually a researcher would expect to find ‘a contrast between what people say and what they actually do’ (Hammersley, 2006, p. 10). In my study, however, the findings from the interview data with writing tutors confirm the findings from the classroom observation data and indicate that tutors are aware of the generic level of provision. Writing tutors attribute the general focus of their teaching to institutional constraints which prevent them from any ‘content related’ input. Writing tutors indicate that there is a need for cooperation between academic and writing tutors; however, they also

seem to indicate that the management does not support such cooperation. Interestingly, the writing tutors do not point at the need to fully embed writing instruction into the subject teaching, but instead they suggest that cooperation between writing and academic tutors should take place explaining that writing tutors can help to *break down the discipline specific requirements*, and academic tutors can assist in understanding what a given assignment entails.

Another observation that arises from the findings is that writing tutors perceive writing support as most beneficial to students when it draws on authentic models of student writing. This finding is line with previous research (see for example Wingate, 2012a; Wingate, et al., 2011). What is surprising in my data, however, is that it is only writing tutors and not academic tutors who refer to reading samples of student work as useful. As I will illustrate later in this chapter, working with samples of student writing could be indeed helpful for academic tutors to articulate more explicitly their expectations of student writing and to develop ‘meta-knowledge’ (Gee, 1990, p. 148) of writing conventions in their disciplines.

### **8.2.3 Research question 3**

*RQ3: How do students understand writing requirements, and what assists them in responding to writing requirements in their academic modules?*

To address this question, I refer to the findings reported from the interview data with the students, which were presented in Chapter 6. It is apparent from the data that students’ understanding of writing requirements builds on input from general support offered in writing classes but also extends to include more discipline specific features of writing. When responding to writing requirements, students first engage in an intellectual process aimed at exploring disciplinary knowledge and then draw on foundational understanding of writing gained from writing classes.

When students are asked about their understanding of writing requirements their answers emphasise the prominence of textual structure and language use that is correct, clear and appropriate for a given subject. It is interesting to observe that the students stress the importance of writing classes as most helpful in becoming familiar with these features of academic writing. For example, Luana said that *everything she*

*knows is thanks to her writing tutor.* These findings go against the critique of general writing provision that dominates the Academic Literacies literature (see for example: Lillis, 2006; Wingate, 2006). The students seem to view writing classes as offering a helpful foundation to their understanding of academic writing. They do not see writing classes as possibly limiting. Additionally, the majority of the students show an awareness that writing across academic modules requires more than just *general knowledge about the essay*, and that writing in different academic disciplines varies depending on a disciplinary context. The students also indicate that in contrast to writing classes which are *very useful* in learning to write, the academic modules are not helpful in furthering their understanding of academic writing as applied to specific disciplinary contexts. The students voice their disappointment and state that academic tutors *should comment about the essay: what they want to know and what they need to see in student writing.*

What is also striking about students' understanding is that they refer to writing and subject 'content' as two separate entities. I have made similar observations in the interview data with academic and writing tutors who tended to indicate that there is a division between 'non-content material' such as writing and 'content' material such as disciplinary knowledge. It seems, therefore, that there is a need to explain and clarify the difference between 'subject content' and 'disciplinary requirements of writing' across the university writing provision.

Moreover, in response to the RQ3 it is important to highlight the contrast between the textual focus with which students explain their understanding of writing requirements and their actual approach to the task of writing, which indicates that the engagement with disciplinary knowledge is of paramount importance in their attempts to meet the requirements. The findings reveal that when preparing to write their essays, students engage in a complex intellectual process which includes reflection on a given topic, reading and thoughtful discussion with peers who write their assignments on (preferably) similar topics or who at least study the same module. In particular, students give much attention to reading academic sources and engaging in discussions with colleagues and peers regarding specific disciplinary issues and topics related to their assignments. In other words, students' understanding of writing requirements emerges as a holistic engagement with a given academic discipline. One of the



students, Natasha, described the whole process of thinking, reading and writing as being similar to *building a house*. It is interesting to observe that both institutional support offered in writing classes and tutors' understandings of what support students need when writing their assignments do not emphasise the need to engage with disciplines through such intellectual process as reported by the students. It is also worth pointing out that even though the concern for writing as rooted in disciplinary epistemologies is central to the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 2004), reading or discussing subject knowledge so far has not been given much attention in its research scholarship on student writing support.

#### 8.2.4 Research question 4

RQ4: *How do students construct answers to essay questions in their academic modules, and to what extent do their answers meet academic tutors' expectations?*

Responding to this research question, I draw on the analytical discussions of students' essays offered in Chapter 7. The analysis of students' writing and of comments they received on their texts would suggest that knowledge representation is a key concern both for students when they write and for tutors when they assess student writing.

When approaching the task of essay writing, student-writers draw on their general understanding of textual structure. However, they do not seem to unproblematically 'transfer' general conceptions of writing to the work on their assignments in academic modules, but rather they build on their familiarity with essay writing by seeking ways of engaging with disciplinary knowledge. For example, Luana found it hard to *relate* examples given in writing classes and writing tutor's suggestion to *restructure* her Socio-Cultural Studies essay; instead, she chose to engage with her essay writing on a more conceptual and epistemological level by exploring issues related to a given essay question. On that basis she was able to use the textual resources she was familiar with and to develop an *excellent* essay. Similarly, Natasha viewed writing classes as offering *general* support and highlighted the importance of reading in her engagement with essay writing as a way of responding to disciplinary requirements. It is interesting to observe that students, even when exposed to *general* writing instruction, tend to

view writing as concerned with specific fields of knowledge and do not seem to approach essay writing as if it was a technical skill.

As far as academic tutors are concerned, when deciding whether students' essays meet the demands of disciplinary assessment, they seem to draw less on textual features of student assignments but their appraisal of student writing is informed by issues related to specific ways of representing knowledge in their respective disciplines. For instance, both of Natasha's essays adhered to general essay writing conventions, but the discussion that she offered in Global Politics and Socio-Cultural Studies was problematic in terms of disciplinary content and ways of demonstrating knowledge in those disciplines. As a result, academic tutors' comments and grades she received reflected subject related issues that her essays displayed.

Based on these findings, it is interesting to observe that the textual focus of writing instruction offered in the writing support classes does not fully reflect how students approach the task of essay writing and how academic tutors assess student writing. It is also quite revealing that when academic tutors provide comments on students' assignments, they appear to be able, in some cases, to move beyond the general level of description and point to issues, such as explicitness of expression, factual data or relevance of ideas, which characterise *satisfactory*, *good* or *excellent* essay. This finding points to an apparent discrepancy: academic tutors when asked in the interviews about writing requirements are less able to characterise them (as discussed with regard to RQ2), yet when they describe the requirements as a commentary on student work, they appear to achieve some level of explicitness articulating their understanding with more clarity.

Finally, in response to the RQ4, it is worth pointing out some insights from the analytical procedures applied by me to the student writing data. Seeking to access students' and tutors' perspectives on written texts, I drew on the 'hidden features' framework (Street, 2009) and in my analysis I combined attention to textual features with attention to tutors' comments on the text. Such an approach yielded findings indicating that the focus solely on text does not reveal whether a given essay meets disciplinary expectations of academic tutors. However, taking a social practice stance and drawing on tutors' comments appeared to be helpful in understanding the extent

to which students' representation of disciplinary knowledge in their writing has been recognised as 'valid' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 170) by academic tutors. This insight is interesting as the combined focus on text and practice seems to have the potential of opening a collaborative space for writing and academic tutors with regard to student writing support. As the Academic Literacies approach has been critiqued for failing to develop a pedagogic approach to writing support (Wingate, 2015), the insights from the analysis of students' essays offered in my thesis can actually contribute to moving the Academic Literacies from a research frame to providing a basis for developing and implementing discipline-specific options of writing support.

### 8.3 Rethinking student writing support

In light of my responses to the subsidiary research questions, I will now focus on answering my main research question: *What can be learnt from currently offered institutional writing support and from students' own ways of approaching the task of assignment writing in their academic disciplines?*

What can be learnt from the writing support offered to my student participants as they were enrolled for their studies? What can be learnt from students' engagement with writing as described in this thesis? Drawing on the insights gained from this study, I would like to put forward four propositions that I believe could be helpful in rethinking currently offered institutional writing support. The propositions refer to:

- ~ viewing writing courses as offering foundational rather than 'transferrable' knowledge of academic writing,
- ~ extending the focus of writing support from sole attention to textual development to include writing practices that relate to reflection, reading and discussion,
- ~ engaging academic staff in developing a social practice approach to student writing support and supporting them in gaining meta-knowledge of writing conventions in their disciplines,
- ~ reconceptualising the notion of 'deficit' as associated with student-writers and suggesting that the deficiency discourse should rather be employed with regard to the institutional shortfalls in provision.

In the sections that follow, I will discuss each of the above propositions in turn. Wherever appropriate, I will indicate how my research adds to the Academic Literacies scholarship on student writing, and I will offer some recommendations as to how writing support could be reconsidered and possibly improved in UK higher education institutions.

### **8.3.1 Writing courses: foundation rather than transferability**

Based on findings from my study, I argue that current writing support provision, offered in separation from disciplinary writing conventions, should be regarded as providing foundational knowledge about writing rather than a set of skills that students can learn and then transfer to disciplinary writing. I further argue that viewing current writing support as foundational would allow the provision to be positioned as a part of a broader picture rather than a stand-alone option. Understood from that perspective, the current writing support delivered in specially designated units could be perceived in a more positive light and its institutional positioning outside of academic departments could, in fact, be justified.

As described in the introductory chapter (see Section 1.2.3) writing provision in UK higher education is designated to special support units, targeting students of all levels of study from across university programmes, and offering instruction limited to generic features of academic writing which presumably can be applied to writing in various academic fields. This type of provision has been critiqued in the Academic Literacies literature (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Wingate, 2006), and more broadly by researchers interested in student writing (Deane & O'Neill, 2011; Elton, 2010; Horne & Peake, 2011; Ivani, 2004). The critique has been put forward based on two main grounds: first, that the support focuses on surface text/language features and does not take account of discipline specificity of academic writing; and second, that it is based on a false assumption that it is possible to learn generic writing conventions and then 'unproblematically' transfer them to disciplinary writing thereby successfully responding to specific demands of written assessment in different academic disciplines.

My study shows a more positive picture of the writing provision offered to students in writing support units. On the one hand, my classroom data yields findings confirming

that writing instruction focuses on elements of surface textual structure and deals with correctness of language use. This corroborates the critique as for example outlined in Lillis's (2006) description of (inadequate) writing provision:

The focus tends to be on more visible 'common sense' notions of what Academic Writing is or should be, such as surface language features (including spelling and a cluster of features referred to as grammar), simplified notions of structure (for example, 'introductions', 'conclusions') and the mechanics of citation conventions. (p. 32)

On the other hand, my findings also provide evidence that writing classes offer instruction covering more than surface text/language features. Namely, writing instruction in support classes includes rhetorical elements helpful in constructing intelligible academic prose and sensitises students to the social aspect of academic writing by focusing on the internal structure of the discourse and emphasising the need to take account of the audience and readership. That type of instruction is more in line with 'hidden features' (Street, 2009) used by academic tutors when they assess students' writing rather than providing support only with the so called 'surface features'. This would suggest that the critique of writing support tends to be oversimplistic and does not seem to reflect what actually happens in writing classrooms. Even though the support does not focus on disciplinary conventions, it offers more than the critique implies.

In addition to providing a more constructive account of current writing support provision, my findings indicate that neither writing tutors nor student-writers assume that instruction in the writing classes directly applies to disciplinary writing. Writing tutors seem to be aware that they offer a *kind of generic support*, as Peter indicates in the quote given at the start of this chapter. Similarly, the students see the support offered as *general about essay* and show awareness that these general rules and norms do not relate directly to writing in their academic modules. Somewhat surprisingly, in my data it is the academic tutors who harbour hopes and assumptions of the transferability of generic support to disciplinary writing. They expect that *things that are judged* as elements of writing in their modules will be taught in writing classes. This may be due to academic tutors having only an implicit understanding of writing conventions in their disciplines and to the fact that in general they tend to place 'low value' (Tuck, 2015, p. 11) on issues related to academic writing.

Another point to make with regard to the current writing support provision is that the Academic Literacies literature tends to report on what writing support does not offer, implying that what it does offer may not be relevant or sufficient (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; Lillis, 2006). It is usually the subject specificity of writing that is highlighted as an issue and a significant gap in the provision. For example, Wingate (2012a) argues that ‘a system that fails to acknowledge that every new student needs to learn the specific conventions and discourses of their discipline is inappropriate’ (p. 27). The literature also suggests a certain division between current ‘dominant’ (and insufficient) approaches to writing support and an ‘oppositional’ (and desirable) Academic Literacies approach (see Lillis, 2006, pp. 31-33). I argue that those divisions should be abandoned. In my opinion, the current provision can function effectively if positioned as offering foundational support rather than implying that it could or should cover all disciplinary aspects of writing. As much as I recognise that more advanced students need more than a foundation, my data indicates that at some level, like in the case of my student participants who seek access to academia, the initial textual focus and general understanding can offer ‘a useful starting point’ (Street, forthcoming) for the teaching and learning of academic literacy. In light of the changing student population in UK universities (see Section 1.2.1), widening participation agendas (R. Jones & Thomas, 2005) and reports that secondary education does not prepare for university level writing (Hardy & Boulton, 2012), such a foundational provision could indeed be helpful.

The foundational positioning of the current provision can be better understood when set against the Academic Literacies theoretical perspective. The original model of student writing proposed by Lea and Street (1998) is made up of three levels comprising ‘study skills’ (usually associated with the current institutional provision), ‘academic socialisation’, and ‘academic literacies’ (see Section 2.3.3 for a detailed account). Lea and Street (1998) argue that the three models should not be seen as residing in exclusive or opposite camps. The authors indeed highlight the connections between the models and signal that each of the models has a different role to play in the support:

We believe that, in teaching as well as in research, addressing specific skills issues around student writing (such as how to open or close an essay or whether to use the first person) takes on entirely different meanings if the context is solely that of study skills, if the process is seen as part of academic socialisation, or if it is viewed more broadly as an aspect of the whole institutional and epistemological context. (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158)

The implication of my research findings is to recognise a broader context in which current writing support is offered and the level of the students who are targeted by such provision. The foundational work and general understandings offered by the ‘study skills’ provision would not be sufficient in all contexts for all levels, but it can offer an adequate beginning to those who are less familiar with academic conventions. Perhaps instead of furthering the critique of current writing support provision and ‘doing away with study skills’ (Wingate, 2006, p. 457), it might be more helpful to explore ways in which the study skills could become, as they are theoretically positioned in the Academic Literacies approach, a part of a broader network of support that potentially is not restricted to special support units but extended to include academic departments with explicit roles given to academic tutors.

### **8.3.2 Before writing: reflecting, reading, discussing**

Having argued that current provision should be recognised as foundational and viewed as a part of a broader picture of writing support, the second proposition that I am putting forward is that the focus of writing support as well as the Academic Literacies scholarship on student writing should be extended from almost exclusive attention to textual conventions and textual development to the inclusion of reflection, reading and discussion as integral to student writing support.

In UK higher education student writing support has been predominantly concentrated on helping students to understand and learn textual conventions of academic writing, in particular with regard to structure and text organisation. Wingate and Tribble (2012) see that as most appropriate and justify the textual focus by arguing that,

As long as higher education assessment regimes retain the written text as the main assessment mechanism, it is likely that the production of texts in unfamiliar genres constitutes the first and foremost problem for the majority of students; therefore for them the type of text they will have to produce is a good starting point for instruction. (p. 489)

In the Academic Literacies literature that focus on text has been maintained by exploring students' and tutors' understanding of writing conventions (see Section 1.2.2 for an account). A particularly important contribution of that strand of research has been to point out that seemingly straightforward wording of writing requirements is underpinned by epistemological conventions and traditions of specific academic disciplines (Lillis, 1999; Scott, 2002; Wingate, 2012b). Lea and Street (1998) in their seminal work argue that even most commonly used terms, such as 'structure' and 'argument' have situated meanings underlined by 'assumptions about the nature of knowledge' (p. 162) in particular academic fields. The need to clarify or make explicit the 'hidden' meanings (Street, 2009) of disciplinary requirements, and even the need to contest the disciplinary conventions (A. Carter, et al., 2009; Lillis, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007) have been the main focus of the Academic Literacies scholarship.

My data confirms students' preoccupation with how to construct a given text and how to understand what is required in a given assignment. However, what came across even more strongly in my findings is that prior to the writing of a given text and dealing with concepts such as 'argument', 'discussion' or 'structure', the students engage in a complex intellectual process which seems to shape their understanding of disciplinary conventions and ways of writing knowledge in their respective academic fields. The conglomerate intellectual process can be described as a fusion of recursive engagement with disciplinary knowledge through critical reflection, engaged reading and deliberative discussion. I, therefore, argue that the textual focus, described earlier, does not offer a holistic representation of what it takes to respond to academic writing requirements. From that perspective, the insights from my study bring a broader understanding of what is involved in student writing. In particular insights from students' accounts obtained using the 'talk-around-assignment-writing' interviewing technique (see Section 3.3.2) indicate that students' understanding of and achievement in academic literacy is related to how they approach the task of writing before the actual writing starts. My student participants reported that before they consider how to develop the text of their assignments, they first take *some period of time for thinking in general about the topic*, and that they try to develop an *opinion*. Then, they read engaging with ideas that are relevant to their topic. Students explain that reading is *very crucial for the writing of an essay*. The process of reading is like *building a house*; it gives them ideas on how they *want to structure [the text]* and *what they want to*



*write about*, as explained by Ronnie, a student whose quote prefaces this chapter. Finally, when engaging with writing the students emphasise the importance of discussing their ideas, preferably with those who *do the same topic* or *share the experience* of writing in the same discipline. That gives them a platform to develop their position, further their general understanding of a given topic and prepare for writing.

Critical reflection, thoughtful reading and discussion of disciplinary content does not seem to have been previously reported in the Academic Literacies literature as integral to student writing. As suggested in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.1), reading has only recently received some attention. Wingate et al. (2011) mention reading as a way of student preparation for lectures and for subsequent writing tasks. They do not report, however, on how students engage with reading; their findings only indicate that assigning reading to students was helpful in covering all intended teaching content in a given lecture. Hardy and Clughen (2012) report that students express anxiety and lack of preparation for both reading and writing at university, which is somewhat mirrored in the opinions shared by academic tutors in the present study who stated that students are unprepared for university level reading and writing, mainly due to the spoon-feeding schooling system.

The lack of focus on reading in the Academic Literacies literature on student writing is a gap that needs to be filled. As in the UK ‘the concept of *reading a subject* remains fundamental’ (Taillefer, 2005, p. 437, added emphasis), and as ‘one of the most common tasks in school and academic settings is to read texts and then use information for writing purposes’ (Grabe, 2003, p. 243), it seems essential to extend the Academic Literacies scholarship in that direction. Similarly, the lack of focus on engaging in critical discussion and promoting reflective thinking is also an area that should be considered for further investigation. Arguing from the perspective of English for Academic Purposes, Kiely (2004) states that discussion can help students to develop critical skills that are desirable in written assessment. Drawing on my findings and on this discussion, I argue that taking account of reflecting-reading-discussing as elements of intellectual engagement with writing can offer a richer understanding of how to rethink institutional writing support provision. More specifically, as reflecting on subject content, engaging with reading and discussing disciplinary knowledge

appears to be closely related to what academic tutors claim as their domain and area of expertise, extending writing support to explicitly include reflection-reading-discussion may open avenues for engaging academic staff in taking disciplinary writing back (from isolated support units) to the centre of learning in the academic disciplines.

### **8.3.3 Academic staff and a social practice approach to student writing**

In this section I focus on academic tutors and argue that even though they appear to have only an implicit knowledge of disciplinary writing conventions, their situated understanding of epistemological requirements of writing in their disciplines can be helpful in developing a social practice approach to student writing support. Such engagement on the part of academic tutors would not only help them to develop an overt understanding of disciplinary writing conventions in their fields, but it could also contribute to the development of writing support options underpinned by social practice in general and by Academic Literacies in particular.

It has been well documented that academic staff tend to have only an implied understanding of writing requirements in their disciplines developed as a result of their own acculturation into a given academic field (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006; Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2012b). Similarly to what other researchers have reported, my findings indicate that when asked about the requirements, academic tutors reveal tacit understanding of the conventions and resort to general descriptive terms such as *introduction*, *conclusions* or *criticality*. An illustration of that can be found in the quote that prefaces this chapter in which Domenico, an academic tutor, attempts to describe what is required from students in writing for a particular discipline but in doing so employs terms such as: *a critical point of view*, *understand critically* or *identify the main shortcomings*. As a result, his account does not reveal what is specifically required in a given type of writing in his academic discipline.

However, my findings also offer an additional insight. Even though academic tutors from my sample appear to have a ‘tacit’ (Jacobs, 2005, p. 477) knowledge of disciplinary writing conventions, I found that in certain circumstances academic tutors were able to characterise these conventions with some degree of precision. Having

analysed student essays by attending to both textual features and tutors' feedback annotations (see Chapter 7), I observed that tutors' comments were very helpful in developing an understanding of tutor expectations and of writing conventions in given subject areas. For example, one of the students finished her introduction to her Global Politics assignment by providing an overview of her essay:

*I will begin by explaining the principle of organisation, will have a look at the international politics, will analyse the military issues in old and recent examples, and will consider the crisis situation in Greece.*

From a textual perspective, the student fulfilled writing requirements by making a 'marker move', which 'structures the discourse by signposting its subsequent direction' (Hyland, 1990, p. 71). The student was taught that rhetorical move in her writing classes. However, her GP academic tutor, even though he noticed that the student *clearly outlined* her subsequent argument, commented that *more clarity* in specific *steps by which* the student intends to develop the text would be needed:

*Your argument is clearly outlined, even though I would have liked more clarity about the steps by which you intend to reach your conclusion (for example: what do you mean by 'the principle of organisation'?).*

The tutor's comment illustrates that he has 'fairly well-defined views regarding what constitutes the elements of a good piece of student writing' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 162) in his subject area. The tutor's comment also illustrates that 'knowledge is analysed, criticised, accepted or discarded' (Shulman, 2005, p. 54) based not on some 'stable' textual features but based on specific practices that are considered as integral to writing in a given discipline. Even though academic tutors perceive writing as *non-content material* and more often than not disassociate themselves from student writing support, I argue that developing ways of collaboration between writing tutors (specialists in textual conventions) and academic tutors (familiar with specific writing practices in given disciplines) could result in developing a social practice approach to student writing support.

I acknowledge that examples of collaborations and pedagogic initiatives involving both academic and writing tutors have been previously reported in the literature (e.g.: Clughen & Hardy, 2012; Deane & O'Neill, 2011). These initiatives are usually inspired by Writing in the Disciplines / Writing across the Curriculum perspectives or by Genre Studies (see Section 2.2 for an account of these approaches). Wingate

(2012a; Wingate & Tribble, 2012) in particular suggests that drawing on genre theories can be helpful in developing mainstream literacy instruction that is sensitive to specific disciplinary contexts and requirements. Wingate (2015) points out that ‘genre-based literacy instruction means that the features of genre, as well as their social functions, are made visible and are explicitly taught to learners’ (p.55). This is a useful perspective; however, genre studies even though sensitive to social contexts are more associated with certain ‘stability’ of given text types or in other words with ‘conventionalised forms of writing [that] become vehicles by which knowledge and information get disseminated to a community of people with shared interests’ (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000, p. 172). In contrast, the Academic Literacies approach explicitly suggests ‘fluidity’ of genres and describes ‘genre types as they emerge in the detailed everyday encounters around writing in particular institutional contexts’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 405). As such the Academic Literacies approach does not view ‘genre knowledge’ (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 405) as ‘stable’ but as related to and emerging from social practice. Drawing on the Academic Literacies perspective, the insights offered by my study add to the work on collaboration and can result in developing approaches to writing support that take account of academic tutors’ situated knowledge of writing conventions in specific academic fields. In the ever evolving context of UK higher education with modularisation of degrees and hybridity of courses (see Section 1.2.1 for an account) developing and providing options of support that can handle ‘fluidity’ and ‘instability’ seems particularly timely.

Moreover, the collaboration between academic tutors and writing tutors can also be helpful in supporting faculty members in developing explicit or ‘meta’ knowledge of ‘fluid’ and ‘unstable’ conventions in their own disciplines. Such meta-knowledge could assist them in developing a more ‘encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159), and could potentially stimulate them to question ‘the conceptual separation of writing [the *non-content material*] from disciplinary learning and meaning-making’ (Tuck, 2015, p. 8) as currently evident in UK higher education (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2001).

### 8.3.4 Student writing support: whose ‘deficit’?

My thesis started in almost a classic way in which many journal articles on student writing support in the UK begin: I pointed to the discourses of ‘falling standards’ (Street, 2004, p. 16) and issues related to academic writing being discussed ‘in terms of [students’] scholastic deficits or a lack of academic literacy’ (Lawrence, 2003, p. 2) (see Section 1.2). It is, indeed, the student ‘deficit’ that is usually foregrounded as a backdrop for discussions, research and pedagogic initiatives on student writing support (English, forthcoming; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Wingate, et al., 2011). Putting forward my final proposition, and building on my discussion so far, I wish to take the transformative stance inscribed in the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, forthcoming), and I wish to question the notion of ‘deficit’ as associated with student-writers and suggest that instead the deficiency discourse should be employed with regard to the institutional shortfalls in provision.

Drawing on the literature and my findings, I argue that instead of emphasising ‘student writing deficit’, what should be emphasised is the students’ endeavour to learn to write. Goodfellow (2005; Goodfellow & Lea, 2005) and Wingate (2008) reported that students make an effort to develop understanding of what is required from them in writing in order to respond (the best they can) to the demands of assessment. Lillis (1999) emphatically writes about ‘*student writers’ desire*’ (p. 141, added emphasis) to become familiar with the disciplinary writing conventions and possibly even negotiate them. My data supports the view that students are engaged in their learning to write. Student-writers in my study assimilated knowledge about writing given to them in writing classes, and that they did attempt to learn the ‘rules of the game’ (Lillis, 2006, p. 35, and also see Luana’s opening quote to Chapter 1) even though discipline-specific writing conventions were not explicitly explained to them. They made a vast intellectual effort to engage with writing through critical reflection, thoughtful reading and discussion with colleagues whom they identified as affiliated to the same or similar disciplinary areas. While it is not questionable that the students may be enrolling for their university programmes without ‘know[ing] how to write’ (Ivani & Lea, 2006, p. 6), their engagement in learning to write, however, tends to be far from deficient. Therefore, it seems inadequate (and to some degree even unjust) to talk about the ‘deficit’ as associated with student-writers. In my view, the discourse of

deficiency should be employed to describe not the student-writers but the institutional shortfalls in writing provision. There are two areas of institutional ‘deficit’ that my study suggests, as I will outline below.

The first area refers to the apparent lack of clarity of what ‘discipline specific conventions’ mean. Namely, what emerged in my study from academic and writing tutors’ interviews is a division between, so called, ‘content’ teaching that academic tutors do, and ‘non-content’ teaching that writing tutors offer. The polarised ‘content’/‘non-content’ positioning appears to imply, as my data suggests, that teaching of discipline specific conventions could be synonymous with teaching ‘content’, which as writing tutors insist is not in their capacity and is strongly opposed by the course management. Such understanding is misleading as the writing conventions, even though they are inscribed in disciplinary epistemology (Lea & Street, 1998), do not entail teaching subject content, but rather they involve offering explicit instruction in how content is written in a given subject area. For example, what constitutes valid supporting evidence in Political Studies or what counts as an argument in Sociological Studies. It appears, from my data, that there is a need for clarification for both writing and academic tutors (and possibly the management) as to what exactly ‘discipline specific conventions’ mean. This striking lack of clarity could possibly be explained by the fact that ‘higher education in the UK is predicated on the notion of [academic] teachers having subject specialism’ (Blythman & Orr, 2003, p. 3) and that the teaching of writing has been traditionally delegated to ‘essay-writing clinics’ (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 166) located outside of academic departments. As a result, the deep association of writing ‘with disciplinary thinking, argument, knowledge, representation and learning is routinely obscured’ (Tuck, 2015, p. 11). This institutional separation between ‘subject teaching’ and ‘writing instruction’ contributes to ‘disciplinary writing requirements’ remaining hidden underneath the ‘content’/‘non-content’ dichotomy (Blythman & Orr, 2003), which appears to directly contribute to the deficit in writing support provision across the institutions of higher education.

The second area of deficit concerns the overall institutional failure in communication with regard to academic writing and writing requirements. My data suggests, and it has also been reported by other researchers (e.g.: Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Lillis, 2006;

Wingate, 2012b) that academic tutors seem unable to explicitly articulate what disciplinary writing requirements entail. Moreover, my findings indicate that writing and academic tutors do not communicate with one another in an attempt to provide discipline specific support, and that writing tutors do not communicate discipline specific requirements to students as they are not familiar with them. The data also suggests that the management does not facilitate such communication between writing and academic staff. A similar institutional lack of communication has been shown in other studies. For instance, Tuck (2015) gives an example of an academic tutor working at management level who ‘claims not to know what happens’ (p.5) in writing support classes offered on the course that he is directing. Wingate (2012a) provides evidence of another tutor who would not ‘mention in regular subject classes’ (p. 30) support available to students in the form of on-line writing materials developed specifically for his module. This failure in communication is in startling contrast to ‘students’ desire for dialogue’ (Lillis, 1999, p. 141) evidenced in my study and reported by others (Hardy & Clughen, 2012). I suggest that this failure in communication indicates that writing support continues to be at the margins of institutions of higher education, and in fact emphasises and exposes substantial institutional deficit in writing support provision.

I stated earlier that putting the notion of ‘deficit’ forward for discussion, I have done so adopting a transformative stance of the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, forthcoming). The transformation that I ascribe to refers to informing current thinking about what counts as academic writing, supporting students and tutors in developing explicit knowledge of writing conventions and stimulating the change in the mainstream writing support provision (see also Section 2.3.3). By the discussion offered here, I want to add to the notion of transformation in Academic Literacies, or rather make it *more explicit*, that a change needs to take place on the level of internal policy and academic regulations governing given departments, schools, faculties and institutions. The change or the *transformation* needs to affect both how discipline specific writing requirements are conceptualised and what channels of communication are established, supported and encouraged in order to re-think and re-invent writing support provision.

## 8.4 Contribution

In comparison to other national contexts, for example the USA (Berlin, 1987; Russell, 1991) or Australia (Purser, 2011; Thies, 2012), student writing support, as a field of study and research, has emerged in the UK relatively recently. As current mainstream support provision, located in specially designated language units, has attracted much critique, there is need to revisit and rethink ways in which UK institutions of higher education support student writers (Clughen & Hardy, 2012; Russell, et al., 2009; Wingate, 2015). The study presented in this thesis aimed to address these concerns. In terms of theoretical stance, the study was located in the Academic Literacies perspective (Lea & Street, 1998), and it makes an original contribution to knowledge by providing a new set of empirical data and by offering findings that add to the understanding of *what is going on* in the current support provision and how student writing support could be reconsidered and possibly redesigned.

On the empirical level previous researchers working in the Academic literacies tradition drew on such ethnographic data as interviews, field work observations, documentary material, samples of student writing and ‘talk-around-text’ conversations aimed at exploring particular textual features or perspectives of student-writers and academic tutors on the text (see Sections 1.3.1 and 2.4.1). Even though researchers in the Academic Literacies tradition have put forward a powerful critique of current support provision, there have not been any studies conducted within the Academic Literacies framework actually investigating the instruction offered in the writing support classroom. The classroom observation data collected and analysed in my study fills that gap and adds to the Academic Literacies research scholarship. Additionally, in my study when interviewing student participants, I extended my empirical interest from ‘talking-around-text’ to ‘talk-around-assignment-writing’ (see Section 3.3.2). This allowed me to have a broader perspective than that previously reported, which have led to findings that extend the Academic Literacies focus from discussions on writing conventions to discussions on writing practices that student-writers resort to when engaging with written assignments.



The findings offered in my study shed new light and contribute to the understanding of issues related to student writing support in UK higher education. In Section 8.3, I have put forward four propositions that explicate in details what my findings add to the field of student writing support and to the Academic Literacies scholarship. In short, the main contributions of the research presented in this thesis include:

- ~ Suggesting that the current critique of writing support tends to be oversimplistic and that writing classes offer more than a mere focus on ‘surface text features’ (Lillis, 2006). Indeed, the teaching includes some of the elements that Academic Literacies researchers see as most helpful in student writing, for example guiding readers through the text and signalling (Street, 2009). Moreover, my findings also indicate that current writing provision should be positioned as offering foundational support, and that it should become a part of a network of support rather than the only support offered on the institutional level.
- ~ Emphasising that writing comprises more than being able to understand requirements and develop a text that responds to the demands of assessment. My data from the ‘talk-around-assignment-writing’ interviews with student-writers indicates that writing is an intellectual process of continuous and recursive engagement with disciplinary knowledge on the level of thinking-reading-debating. This has not previously been reported to such an extent by Academic Literacies researchers, and this adds to the current scholarship.
- ~ Indicating that a social practice approach to student writing support should be developed in collaboration between academic and writing tutors; such collaboration would also be helpful in providing ways of support for academic staff in developing an explicit awareness of their writing conventions.
- ~ Questioning the notion of ‘*deficit*’ as associated with student-writers and arguing that discourse of deficiency should be employed to talk about the institutional shortfalls in writing support provision. In line with this argument, my study also emphasised the need to conceptualise what ‘disciplinary writing conventions’ entail and to open institutional channels of communication that would help to recognise writing as part of disciplinary learning.

### **8.5 Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The study reported in this thesis aimed at exploring perceptions and perspectives of writing tutors, academic tutors and student writers with regard to writing support and in particular with regard to responding to academic writing requirements. The research was designed as a qualitative, ethnographically oriented study (Silverman, 2005), and it can be critiqued on two levels, namely the research sample and methods of data collection.

As far as the research sample is concerned, it can be argued that in this study the academic tutors were underrepresented. Since one of the aims of the study was to understand how students respond to and whether they manage to meet the demands of written assessment in their academic modules, the perceptions of academic tutors with that regard appear of high importance to my study. Therefore, it can be said that a sample comprising only three academic tutors may seem insufficient. However, the number of academic tutors participating in my study was a result of both practical constraints and their low interest in a research on academic writing. As explained in the methodology chapter (see Section 3.2.3), there were in total five academic tutors who taught on the PMP during the data collection. This means that even if all of them had participated, the maximum number of academic tutors would have not exceeded five, so the sample would not have been much larger. All of the tutors were approached and invited to participate. Even though they all initially consented to partake in my research, eventually two decided not to participate explaining that academic writing is not related to their teaching. Such outcome, even though it can be considered as a limitation, in fact supports what has been reported in the literature that faculty members tend not see writing as a part of their professional commitments and exhibit low interest in participating in studies on student writing support (Tuck, 2015; Wingate, 2012a). Additionally, my study was conducted employing an ethnographic perspective (Green & Bloome, 2004) and drew on case studies, analytical induction (J. Mitchell, 1984) and purposeful sampling (Sandelowski, 1995); this means that the overall size of my research sample tended to be of less importance, what counted was my participants' perceptions and their insider perspectives on issues related to student writing support.

With regard to the methods of data collection, a certain limitation of my study is how the data was obtained from the student participants. One of the key goals of my study was to investigate what students do when they approach the task of responding to academic writing requirements. I chose to gain insight into their engagement with writing through semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, it can be argued that other methods of data collection would have been more effective in collecting the type of data I was looking for. For example, regular diary logs (Bailey, 1990; Marefat, 2002) or think aloud protocols (Ferguson, Bråten, & Strømsø, 2012) could have yielded more detailed data. These methods were initially considered, but due to different practical constraints they were not used. Diary logs were not used as that the PMP was a very intensive programme and asking my student participants to engage in diary writing alongside their efforts to meet assessment deadlines might not have been a task feasible for them to accomplish. Due to time constraints their diary logs could have been general, superficial and hastily written, if written at all. Such data may not have added value to my study. As for think aloud protocols, this method was not used as asking students to record the protocols would have meant distributing to them equipment to record their stream of talk. Even though the recording would not have been potentially time consuming for the students, and even though the data would have been valuable, the resources needed for such method of data collection were not available in this study. If this research had been designed as a longitudinal case study of a smaller sample of students (for example, two or three participants), the use of think aloud protocols would have been more achievable.

Bearing in mind both the limitations of my study outlined above, the key findings discussed earlier (Section 8.2) and the propositions that I have put forward (Section 8.3), I suggest that further research on student writing support in the UK could be conducted in three areas. The first area should establish the research focus on student writing as a part of a complex intellectual process including reflection, reading and discussion. Much work has been done, for example, in reading in first or second language (Belcher, 2006; Carson, 1993; Grabe, 2003, 2009). Drawing on insights from that scholarship could assist researchers in Academic Literacies in exploring the relationship between writing and reading, discussing or thinking. The second area that undoubtedly requires more research attention is the issue of engaging academic staff in writing support initiatives and in collaboration on developing approaches that can

support student writing in their disciplines. Here, it might be helpful to draw on WID/WAC perspectives (Bazerman et al., 2005; McLeod & Soven, 1992; Townsend, 2002) that have long institutional traditions of establishing collaboration between writing centres and academic departments. In particular reaching out to scholars working in the Writing in the Disciplines movement could be greatly beneficial as their work is directly oriented towards supporting academic staff (M. Carter, 2007; Monroe, 2003, 2006). Finally, I suggest that even though the Academic Literacies research tends to be small and qualitative in nature (Lea, 2004), there is a real need and necessity for a more comprehensive and bigger study that would survey writing support provision at the national level, possibly with a focus on institutional channels of communication and on how writing is perceived by those who are in the position of power to initiate change in the mainstream writing support provision.

## 8.6 Final remarks

The purpose of this thesis was to explore *what is going on* in the writing support in the UK higher education in order to gain insight into how the provision can be re-considered and possibly re-designed at the institutional level. It is vital to stress that this study did not set out to evaluate the teaching on the Pre-Masters Programme or the students' learning of academic writing conventions. The purpose of this study was exploratory: in line with the Academic Literacies tradition (Street, 2004) I sought to access the *emic perspectives* of my research participants and to gain some understanding of their teaching and writing practices. My participants were all indeed very generous and engaged in the research process, eagerly sharing with me their experience, perceptions, understandings as well as their educational and professional aspirations. They were all committed to their social roles as academic tutors, writing tutors or student-writers. Some of the tutors have recently completed their doctorates and others have advanced to more senior roles and act as convenors of programmes similar to the Pre-Masters. My student participants successfully progressed in their academic education, and having completed the PMP they embarked and graduated from MA level courses, some of them from the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the UK. They still keep in touch and some are now pursuing their PhDs. As a researcher taking an ethnographic perspective in my work, it was one of my main concerns to let the voices of my participants be heard (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007)

and to represent their experience without imposing my own preconceived ideas. I hope that, through my analytical endeavour, this has been achieved.

As I have explained in the introductory chapter, this thesis and the study that it presents originated from my professional experience and growing awareness of the institutional frameworks and complexities that are associated with the writing support provision in the institutions of higher education. Starting my research I was driven by my pedagogic concern as to whether the support offered to students was what they actually needed to succeed in their academic courses. This concern accompanied me throughout this PhD journey, and it was extremely encouraging to observe similar considerations among some of my research participants, in particular the writing tutors. In one of the quotes that I used to preface this chapter, Peter, a writing tutor articulated this pedagogic concern in a simple but also profound way: *I sometimes feel as if we have to, kind of, teach generic academic writing and hope that the students can, kind of, tailor their writing towards those specific areas. ... I don't think it's good at all.* The view that Peter expressed echoes not only with my own professional experience but also with the research literature (e.g. Deane & O'Neill, 2011; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Tuck, 2015; Wingate, 2015). This emphasises the necessity to review how students are supported and how writing – as a medium of creating and developing disciplinary knowledge – is understood and incorporated into university teaching.

Finally, before I end I want to share that the intellectual and educational process that I have gone through while working towards the completion of this thesis has been very recursive and has convoluted with a constant interplay between my ever growing professional commitments, the new experience of studying in the UK, and also it was intersected by losses and joys of human life. In this process I have often reflected on my continued motivation to conduct this study. At one point in my doctoral degree I had a great opportunity to meet and interview Nancy Hornberger, and during that interview she explained to me that she herself at the beginning of her work at university was wondering about her place in the academia and the value of her work. Referring to her experience of being a missionary for over ten years among the Andean Quechua speakers, she said:

*I think that this sense of service and commitment to people have really sustained me up to the present. Specially in the early years of my academic career when I would be kind of wondering why am I doing this as this is so much work, a lot of pressure and everything, and you can get a little caught up in, the academy can be a very competitive environment, very much focused on people's achievements and that's not really what I am, that's not kind of my makeup. So, I would think why am I here anyway? So, I was able to say to myself that I am here because I think I might be able to have, and my students might be able to have, some positive effect on people, like Quechua speakers, who are the most marginalised and disposed in our world, so that kind of kept me going. So, in some ways I still have that missionary zeal even though I do not do it in the realm of the church. (personal communication, 26 February 2009)*

I strongly feel that my experience resonates with hers. Before returning to graduate school I had spent several years working in a contemplative community within the Catholic Church, and when afterwards I decided to go back to university for an MA course, and now while pursuing a PhD degree, I often kept asking myself about my motivation to work in education and in particular about the contribution of my work to the overall field of the Educational Studies. What sustained me in this effort was a similar (to Nancy Hornberger's) sense of service and commitment to my current, past and future students, and also a sense of responsibility towards my research participants. Now, when the study has been written up, I hope that my research will provide insights on *ways with writing* support, and that it will help to re-think, inform and perhaps change institutional provision in higher education in the UK. Moreover, on a more theoretical level, I hope that this study will contribute to the Academic Literacies scholarship by illustrating how this scholarship can help to understand pedagogic practices prevalent in writing support, as well as by informing this scholarship with insights gained from currently offered institutional writing support and from student-writers' ways of engaging with academic literacy and responding to the demands of academic writing in their academic disciplines.

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## **Appendix**

## Appendix 1.1 Presentations associated with this thesis

<b>PASE Conference</b> (Polish Association for the Study of English) University of Wroclaw, Wroclaw, Poland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presented a paper on <u>the development of academic writing by international students</u></li> </ul>	April 2008
<b>International Brno Conference on Linguistics Studies in English</b> Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presented a paper on <u>coherence in written academic discourse</u></li> </ul>	Sept 2008
<b>Ethnography Forum</b> University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA panel presentation chaired by Professor Brian Street and discussed by Professor Constant Leung <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contributed a paper on <u>the ethnographic perspectives of the development of academic writing by international students</u></li> </ul>	Feb 2009
<b>Bloomsbury Students' Conference in Applied Linguistics</b> Birkbeck College, University of London	June 2009
<b>Academic Literacies Seminar – Can Academic Literacies be taught?</b> Queen Mary, University of London	June 2009
<b>EATAW Conference</b> (European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing) University of Coventry, Coventry, UK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>during these three events presented a paper on <u>students' literacy practices that may contribute to their success in learning to write at university</u></li> </ul>	July 2009
<b>Ethnography Forum</b> University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA panel presentation with Professor Brian Street, Dr Ursula Wingate and Dr Myrna Cohen on <i>The 'Academic Literacies' and Writing Support in Universities; Case Studies from UK and USA</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presented a paper on <u>students' writing games and writing support</u></li> </ul>	Feb 2010
<b>European Writing Centres Association</b> The American University of Paris, Paris, France <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presented a paper on academic writing development <u>in higher education</u></li> </ul>	May 2010
<b>British Association of Applied Linguistics</b> University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presented of a paper on <u>the development of academic writing by international students</u></li> </ul>	Sept 2010
University literacies: Knowledge, Writing, Disciplines	Sept 2010
<b>Université Charles de Gaulle - Lille 3, Lille, France</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presented of a paper on <u>students' academic literacy practices</u></li> </ul>	
<b>Writing Research Across Borders II Conference</b> George Mason University, Washington, USA Panel presentation with Professor Brian Street and Dr Ursula Wingate on <i>The 'Academic Literacies' Approach and Intervention Possibilities: Case Studies of Academic Writing Development</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presented a paper on <u>Academic Literacies perspective on student writing development</u></li> </ul>	Feb 2011
<b>Transatlantic Dialogue on Research in Language and Literacy</b> King's College London <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>co-presented with doctoral students, Tiffany Chiu and Polly Mercer, on <u>'Academic Literacies in the UK Higher Education'</u></li> </ul>	May 2012
<b>Ethnography Forum</b> University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA Panel presentation chaired by Professor Brian Street and discussed by Professor Constant Leung <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contributed a paper <u>'Against the Current' on academic writing support in the UK higher education</u></li> </ul>	Feb 2013

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Writing Research Across Borders II Conference</b><br/>         Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre La Défense<br/>         Symposium on <i>Academic Literacies and writing development: Case studies from UK and Brazil</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contributed a paper: <u>Guessing Game: international students' accounts of responding to the requirements of essay writing in the UK postgraduate programmes</u></li> </ul> <p><b>Continued Professional Development Conference</b><br/>         Queen Mary University of London</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presented during a data session on classroom observations: <u>'Who likes number one?'</u></li> </ul> <p><b>LIHERG Seminar</b> (Language in Higher Education Research Group)<br/>         Queen Mary University of London</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presented a paper on issues related to mainstream writing support in the UK: <u>Writing classroom – insights from discourse analysis</u></li> </ul> <p><b>EATAW Conference</b><br/>         (European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing)<br/>         Symposium on <i>What does Academic Literacies do for us? Pedagogising theory and theorizing pedagogy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contributed a paper: <u>"That's kind of real university" – ethnographic perspectives on institutional writing support in the UK higher education</u></li> </ul> | <p>Feb 2014</p> <p>April 2014</p> <p>Sept 2014</p> <p>June 2015</p> |
|---|---|

**Appendix 2.1 Academic Literacies: three-levelled model of student writing**

Models of Student Writing in Higher Education
<p>▪ <b>Study Skills</b></p> <p><i>Student deficit</i></p> <p>‘fix it’; atomised skills; surface language, grammar, spelling; surface text features ‘introductions’, ‘conclusions’</p> <p>Sources: Behavioural and Experimental Psychology</p> <p>⇒ <i>Student writing as</i> technical and instrumental skill</p>
<p>▪ <b>Academic socialisation</b></p> <p><i>Acculturation of students into academic discourse</i></p> <p>Inculcating students into new ‘culture’; focus on student orientation to learning and interpretation of learning task e.g. ‘deep’, ‘surface’, ‘strategies’ learning; homogenous ‘culture’; lack of focus on institutional practices, change and power</p> <p>Sources: Social Psychology; Anthropology; Constructivism</p> <p>⇒ <i>Student writing as</i> transparent medium of representation</p>
<p>▪ <b>Academic literacies</b></p> <p><i>Students’ negotiation of conflicting literacy practices</i></p> <p>Literacies as social practices; at level of epistemology and identities; institutions as sites of/constituted in discourses and power; variety of communicative repertoire e.g. genres, fields, disciplines; switching re: linguistic practices, social meanings and identities</p> <p>Sources: New Literacy Studies, Critical discourse Analysis; Systemic Linguistics; Cultural Anthropology</p> <p>⇒ <i>Student writing as</i> constitutive and contested</p>

(C. Jones, Turner & Street, 1999, p. xx)



## Appendix 2.2 Argumentative essay structure

STAGE	MOVE
<b>1. Thesis</b>  <b>Introduces the proposition to be argued</b>	<p><b>Gambit (optional)</b> Attention Grabber – controversial statement or dramatic illustration.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘The South African Government stands constantly trapped between the anvil of right-wing resistance and the hammer of international opprobrium.’</i></p> <p><b>Information (optional)</b> Presents background material for topic contextualisation.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘Education is an investment in people and is vital to the progress and development of the society.’</i></p> <p><b>Proposition (obligatory)</b> Furnishes a specific statement of position which defines the topic and gives a focus to the composition.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘The Universities should be given more financial assistance by government to improve the quality of graduates in this country.’</i></p> <p><i>‘There is one sector that stands out in developing the country. This is the base of our education system – the community schools. This is where we should pay the closest attention.’</i></p> <p><b>Evaluation (optional)</b> Positive gloss – brief support of proposition.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘This sector is the most important because it provides basic knowledge and skills.’</i></p> <p><b>Marker (optional)</b> Introduces and/or identifies a list.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘There are a number of reasons for increasing assistance to community education.’</i></p> <p><i>‘A solution has at least three interlocking parts.’</i></p>
<b>2. Argument</b>  <b>Discusses grounds for thesis (four move argument sequence can be repeated indefinitely)</b>	<p><b>Marker (obligatory)</b> Signals the introduction of a claim and relates it to the text.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘Turning to the economic benefits of vocational education...’</i></p> <p><i>‘Another way to improve the standard it to ...’</i></p> <p><b>Restatement (optional)</b> Rephrasing or repetition of proposition.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘The second reason why more money should be directed at the tertiary sector is ...’</i></p> <p><b>Claim (obligatory)</b> States reason for acceptance of the proposition. Typically based on:</p> <p>a. Strength of perceived shared assumptions.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>‘Providing for this sector also helps people learn how to vote in elections rather than someone directing them.’</i></p>

	<p>b. A generalisation based on data or evidence.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'We spend least for each student in community schools for the highest social return.'</i></p> <p>c. Force of conviction.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'It cannot be denied that higher forms of education decrease our dependence on foreign domination in the economy.'</i></p> <p><b>Support (obligatory)</b> States the grounds which underpin the claim. Typically based on:</p> <p>a. Explicating assumptions used to make claim.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'...all children should be allowed a basic education.'</i></p> <p>b. Providing data or citing references.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'The connection almost always involves some tacit understandings or warrants (Peters 1985: 8)...'</i></p>
<p><b>3. Conclusion</b></p> <p><b>Synthesises discussion and affirms the validity of the thesis</b></p>	<p><b>Marker (optional)</b> Signals conclusion boundary.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'To conclude, it can be stated that ...'</i></p> <p><b>Consolidation (obligatory)</b> Presents the significance of the argument stage to the proposition.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'Thus the quality of the graduates is improved and the various sectors of the community are satisfied.'</i></p> <p><b>Affirmation (optional)</b> Restates proposition.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'The community level is thus a crucial stage in development and therefore deserves more.'</i></p> <p><b>Close (optional)</b> Widens context or perspective of proposition.</p> <p>e.g.: <i>'Unless active measures are taken, the next generation will have little to thank us for when they start to contemplate the transport system they have been left.'</i></p>

(Hyland, 1990, pp. 69-74)

### Appendix 3.1 Summary of breakdown and calculation of PMP assessment

Module / Skill assessed		Term	Coursework	Coursework value		Final Exam	Course-work + Exam	Module total	Programme total
Subject Knowledge Modules	Elective Module	1	Formative assignment	0%	50%	+50%	=100%	100%	25%
		2	Assignment	20%					
		3	Assignment	30%					
	Compulsory Module	1	Formative assignment	0%	50%	+50%	=100%	100%	25%
		2	Assignment	20%					
		3	Assignment	30%					
English Communication Modules	Reading	1-3	Formative tasks reading	0%	5%	+20%	=25%	100%	50%
		2	Assessed task reading	5%					
	Writing	1-3	Formative tasks writing	0%	15%	+10%	=25%		
		2	Critique	15%					
	Listening	1-3	Formative tasks listening	0%	5%	+20%	=25%		
		2	Assessed task listening	5%					
	Speaking	1	Formative presentation oral	0%	25%	–	=25%		
		2	Oral presentation	10%					
		3	Oral presentation	15%					

### Appendix 3.2 Writing classes: detailed syllabus

	WRITING	WRITING/READING	WRITING/GRAMMAR/ VOCAB
<b>TERM 1</b>			
<b>Week 1</b>	Induction Week: No Class	Induction Week: No Class	Reading & Writing skills overview/needs analysis and diagnostic written text
<b>Week 2</b>	In-text referencing conventions (guide)*	Incorporating sources (1): introduction to quoting, paraphrasing and summarising*	Incorporating sources (2); paraphrasing* / using thesauri*
<b>Week 3</b>	Incorporating sources(3): summarising*	Understanding and recognising plagiarism*	<b>Plagiarism awareness task*</b>
<b>Week 4</b>	Analysing (actual ) assignment questions / brainstorming*	Library skills (using titles, contents page etc. to select relevant material)	Feedback on plagiarism awareness task* / using dictionaries
<b>Week 5</b>	Planning / writing an outline*	Reading around the topic / note-taking / expanding the outline	Paraphrase and parallelism when taking notes and writing outlines
<b>Week 6</b>	Assignment format / essay structure (1) (discursive assignments and reports <sup>18</sup> )*	Reading skills: understanding text organisation (time/relationships between ideas)	Assignment format / essay structure (2) (discursive assignments and reports)*
<b>Reading Week</b>			
<b>Week 7</b>	Paragraph structure (1): Supporting main ideas (exemplification, detail, etc. )*	Reading skills: identifying and understanding main and supporting ideas	Identifying / developing cohesion and coherence in an text (1)
<b>Week 8</b>	Writing introductions*	Writing bibliographies (guide)*	Writing thesis statements / topic sentences
<b>Week 9</b>	Writing introductions*	Editing, proofreading and reviewing assignments (1)*	Grammar / vocabulary structures (1) <sup>19</sup>
<b>Week 10</b>	Paragraph structure (2): distinguishing relevance from irrelevance / repetition of key ideas etc.	Reading skills: purpose, predicting and applying background knowledge	Applying lexical variety and avoiding repetition in a text / using synonyms / technical vocabulary / collocations
<b>Week 11</b>	Understanding and applying feedback (per discussion) / generic feedback on Assignment 1 *	Reading skills: skimming for gist	Grammar / vocabulary structures (2)
<b>TERM 2</b>			
<b>Week 12</b>	Structure and elements of a critique (1)* <b>Critiques set</b>	Reading skills (using example critiques): understanding a writer's attitude and purpose / critical analysis*	Formality and style in academic writing (1): passive voice, thinking about audience etc.
<b>Week 13</b>	Structure and elements of a critique (2)*	Reading skills (using example critiques): recognising connotations, interference, cultural difference, objectivity / subjectivity / critical analysis*	Formality in style in academic writing (2): nominalisation etc.
<b>Week 14</b>	Synthesising sources within a text (1)* (further practice)	Distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information in a text / being concise and sticking to the point	Expressing caution (qualification) (1)
<b>Week 15</b>	Editing, proofreading and reviewing (2)*	Reading skills: scanning for detail / guessing unknown vocabulary <sup>20</sup>	Developing cohesion and coherence in an essay (2): anaphoric referencing and summarising nouns etc.

<sup>18</sup> Essay/report structures included here will cover those needed to answer assignments 1,2 and 3

<sup>19</sup> Structures covered will be according to the needs of the class (e.g. cohesive devices, complex sentences, clauses, modality, articles, emphasis, punctuation, word-building etc.)

<sup>20</sup> Texts will become increasingly longer and techniques for increasing reading speed introduced

<b>Week 16</b>	Writing discursive texts (distinguishing between fact and opinion)	Reading comprehension under timed conditions (1): time management*	Grammar / vocabulary structures (3) <sup>21</sup>
<b>Reading Week</b>			
<b>Week 17</b>	Writing answers in reading tasks (expectations)*	Reading coursework task practice*	Generic feedback on critiques
<b>Week 18</b>	Writing comparison and contrast / cause and effect texts	<b>Reading Coursework Task (assessed)*</b>	Reading skills overview / practice
<b>Week 19</b>	Writing (short) essays under timed conditions (1): time management etc. *	Generic feedback on reading coursework task*	Grammar / vocabulary structures (4)
<b>Week 20</b>	Writing (short) essays under timed conditions (2)*	Reading comprehension under timed conditions (2)*	Grammar / vocabulary structures (5)
<b>Week 21</b>	PRESENTATION (assessed) / PROGRESS TESTS		
<b>TERM 3</b>			
<b>Week 22</b>	Generic feedback on writing progress test*	Generic feedback on reading progress test*	Writing data interpretation
<b>Week 23</b>	Writing descriptive / process texts	Reading skills (using descriptive / process texts)	Grammar / vocabulary structures (7) <sup>22</sup>
<b>Week 24</b>	Writing situation-problem-solution-evaluation texts (NB Bank holiday for some groups)	Reading skills (using situation-problem-solution-evaluation texts)	Grammar / vocabulary structures (8)
<b>Week 25</b>	Overview of writing skills	Overview of reading skills	Grammar/vocabulary structures (9)
<b>Week 26</b>	Writing exam practice (1)*	Reading exam practice (1)*	Grammar/vocabulary structures (10)
<b>Reading Week</b>			
<b>Week 27</b>	<b>FINAL EXAMINATIONS/PRESENTATIONS</b>		
<b>Week 28</b>			

Texts will predominantly follow the topics in the compulsory academic module in *Socio-Cultural Studies*.

\*The timing of these classes is intended to support you in meeting the requirement of the assessment, although not all topics will necessarily be covered in the classes allocated here.

<sup>21</sup> Structures covered will be according to the needs of the class (e.g. cohesive devices, complex sentences, clauses, modality, articles, emphasis, punctuation, word-building etc.)

<sup>22</sup> Structures covered will be according to the needs of the class (e.g. cohesive devices, complex sentences, clauses, modality, articles, emphasis, punctuation, word-building etc.)

### Appendix 3.3 Accessing the research field (hand-out)

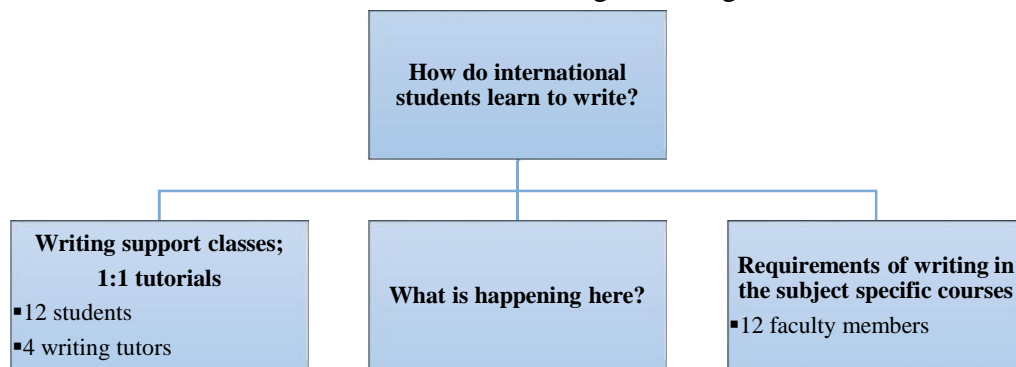
#### GENERAL INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE LANGUAGE CENTRE

**Research title: Development of Academic Writing by International Students**

**PhD RESEARCH REP(EM)/08/09-86**

#### 1. Research Aim

This study investigates how international undergraduate students bridge the gap between writing support provision and writing requirements in the subject specific courses. Major focus is on investigating writing strategies that students may use in order to meet the conventions of academic writing at an English medium university.



#### 2. Research Sample and Data Collection

**If a student agrees to take part in the study:**

- He/she will give an hour **interview** each term on his/her past experience and current practice of academic writing in English. During the interview he/she will be particularly encouraged to discuss how his/her literacy practices assist his/her understanding of academic conventions and help them while composing his/her academic texts:
  - *The interviews will be conducted at the university, at a time convenient for the participants and in places easily accessible and comfortable for them, (for example: an empty classroom, a library resource room or a faculty member's office).*
  - *The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.*
- He/she will provide a researcher with **a copy of two papers written for a writing centre and two papers written for subject specific courses** (in total: four papers).
- He/she will familiarize the researcher with **the places, i.e. writing centre, library, where he/she normally writes the assignments**, and with the practices that enhance his/her process of writing in these places.
  - *These field trips will be done at maximum twice with each student and will last at maximum one hour.*

**If a writing tutor agrees to take part in the study:**

- He/she will agree that his/her **writing classes** will be **observed and video-recorded** twice a term.
- He/she will give two **interviews** of approximately an hour each during which he/she will be encouraged to discuss his/her perspective on the development of academic writing by international students, in particular with reference to students literacy practices as possible factors enhancing their learning to write.
  - *The interviews will be conducted at the university, at a time convenient for the participants and in places easily accessible and comfortable for them (for example: empty classroom, a library resource room or a faculty member's office).*
  - *The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.*

**If a faculty member agrees to take part in the study:**

- He/she will give an hour interview during which he/she will be encouraged to discuss his/her perspective on the development of academic writing by international students and in particular with reference to students literacy practices as possible factors enhancing their learning to write.
  - *The interviews will be conducted at the university, at a time convenient for the participants and in places easily accessible and comfortable for them, (for example: empty classroom, a library resource room or a faculty member's office).*
  - *The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.*

**3. Significance:**

It is hoped that the insights from the study:

- will contribute to the understanding of how international students respond to the complex requirements of writing at university in the UK
  - may help to take criticism of presently offered writing support into a new phrase thereby redefining pedagogic practices and the spaces traditionally assigned to the teaching writing at university
-

### Appendix 3.4 Students' recruitment materials

REC Protocol Number: REP(EM)/08/09-86

Title of the study: **Development of Academic Writing by International Students**

#### **Research design**

Duration:

- academic year of 2009/2010

Participants:

- 12 international pre-master's students
- writing tutors and faculty members teaching these students

Data Collection:

- Official documents
  - e.g.: course handbook, assignment descriptions, hand-outs, etc.
- Writing classes observations (video-recorded)
  - Twice a term with each writing tutor participating in the study
- Interviews (recorded using a digital voice recorder)
  - Students: one interview each term
  - Writing tutors: one interview each term
  - Course tutors: one interview
- Students' assignments:
  - 2 assignments written for writing classes
  - 2 assignments written for content courses

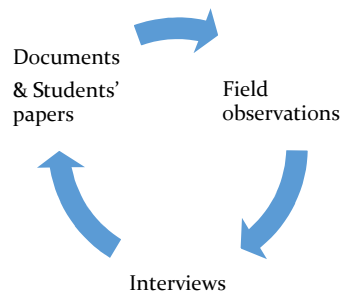


Figure 1. Data Collection

Data Management:

The information, such as research data, consent forms and administrative records, will be retained for the whole period of my PhD studies (i.e. till the end of 2011), and it will be securely kept by the researcher only. The research data will be stored in the following format:

- Interviews will be kept both as digital voice recording files burned on a CD and as transcribed documents.
- Video-recordings of writing classes will be kept as digital recording files burned on a DVD.
- Students' papers will be kept as photocopies of the originals; the originals will be returned to the participants.

Confidentiality of the personal information:

- Personal details of all the participants will be anonymised and presented to the participants for their approval before writing a final report.
- The personal details and a conversion chart for the anonymisation will be kept separately from each other and from the data.
- Any names of persons or institutions will be deleted from the recording material and will not be disclosed in any written report of the research.



Circular letter for use for recruitment of volunteers for study ref REP(EM)/08/09-86 approved by Research Ethics Committee at King's College London. This project contributes to the King's College's role in conducting research, and teaching research methods. You are under no obligation to reply to this email; however, if you choose to, participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

**Dear Students,**

I would like to invite you to participate in this doctoral research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve.

Context of the research:

UK universities attract high numbers of international students every year. As writing is one of the major forms of assessment in the UK, writing support provision is one of the essential services offered for international students to help those master conventions of writing in their disciplines.

Aims of the research and possible benefits:

The present study aims to investigate how literacy practices undertaken by students enhance their learning of academic writing, and how these literacy practices can inform the design of pedagogy for the teaching of writing at support units as well as across university programmes.

I am looking for:

International students who are currently pursuing their undergraduate degrees or pre-masters courses in any subjects, and who are using the services of the writing centre.

What does the study involve?

The study will run over the academic year of 2009/2010, and if you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to:

- provide a researcher with a copy of four papers written during 2009/2010 academic year,
- give an interview each term on your past experience and current practice of academic writing in English,
- provide the researcher with the information about the places where you normally writes the assignments (e.g. writing centre, library).

Ethical Considerations:

Your participation in the study does not involve any risks; however, if you have any questions or concerns about taking part in this study, please contact the researcher at any time. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

Benefit of participation:

Your participation is really much appreciated. Upon the completion of the study, you will be given a thank-you letter and offered a copy of the final report once it is ready.

What do I have to do, if I am interested?

If you are interested or would like any further information regarding the present study, please contact me at [weronika.gorska@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:weronika.gorska@kcl.ac.uk)

**Thank you very much for your help.**

Best wishes,  
Weronika Górska  
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Franklin-Wilkins Building G10  
Waterloo Road SE1 9NH  
e-mail: [weronika.gorska@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:weronika.gorska@kcl.ac.uk)

## Appendix 3.5 Information sheet for student participants

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENTS

REC Protocol Number: REM(EM)/08/09-86



### YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: **Development of Academic Writing by International Students**

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. The project is longitudinal and will last during the academic year of 2009/2010. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### The aims of the research are:

- To investigate how literacy practices undertaken by students enhance their learning of academic writing.
- To explore how students' literacy practices can inform the design of pedagogy for the teaching of writing at a university.
- To investigate staff's perception of the development of academic writing by students coming from linguistic and cultural backgrounds different to English.
- To critically scrutinize cross-cultural aspects of academic writing, with a particular focus on portability of genres and discourse strategies across cultures and disciplines.

#### Possible benefits:

- The study may help to improve the quality of delivery of both writing and subject specific courses at the university where it will be conducted.
- In a wider context, this study has been designed to contribute to the on-going debate on the pedagogy of writing in higher education.
- Participants may, if they wish, request a copy of the final report

#### The research participants will be randomly selected from:

- International students pursuing undergraduate degrees and studying in one of the universities of London.
- Writing tutors and faculty members teaching the participant students.

#### If you agree to take part in the study:

- You will participate in an interview each term (in total you will participate in 3 interviews of max 45 min each); during the interview you will be asked to discuss your past experience and current practice of academic writing in English. During the interview you will be particularly encouraged to describe how your literacy practices assist your understanding of academic conventions and help you while composing your academic texts;
  - *The interviews will be conducted at the university, at a time convenient for you and in places easily accessible and comfortable for you, (for example: an empty classroom, a library resource room or a faculty member's office).*
  - *Provided that you give your consent, the interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder;*
- You will provide the researcher with a copy of two papers written for a writing centre and two papers written for subject specific courses (in total: four papers).
- You will provide the researcher with the information about the places where you normally write the assignments (e.g. writing centre, library).
- Twice a term, I will observe writing classes that you attend; the classes will be video-recorded with a camera situated in such a way that those who do not wish to be captured on the tape, and this may include yourself, will be able to comfortably participate in given sessions.

#### Any risks connected with the participation in the study:

- The participation in the study does not involve any risks.

#### Arrangements for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality

- Your personal details will be anonymised.
- The personal details and conversion chart for the anonymisation will be kept separately from each other and from the data.

- Any names of persons or institutions will be deleted from the recording material and will not be disclosed in any written report of the research.

Informed consent and withdrawal:

- If you choose to take part in the study, you will be kindly asked to return a signed consent form before the study begins.
- You will be able to withdraw from the study by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, i.e. till the close of data collection.
- You will be able to withdraw your data from the study by the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, i.e. two weeks after the close of the data collection.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

Primary Researcher:

Weronika Górska  
Department of Education and Professional Studies  
Franklin-Wilkins Building G10  
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e-mail: [veronika.gorska@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:veronika.gorska@kcl.ac.uk)

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## Appendix 3.6 Information sheet for writing tutors

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR WRITING TUTORS

REC Protocol Number: REP(EM)/08/09-86

#### YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET



University of London

Title of the study: **Development of Academic Writing by International Students**

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. The project is longitudinal and will last during the academic year of 2009/2010. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### The aims of the research are:

- To investigate how literacy practices undertaken by students enhance their learning of academic writing.
- To explore how students' literacy practices can inform the design of pedagogy for the teaching of writing at a university.
- To investigate staff's perception of the development of academic writing by students coming from linguistic and cultural backgrounds different to English.
- To critically scrutinize cross-cultural aspects of academic writing, with a particular focus on portability of genres and discourse strategies across cultures and disciplines.

#### Possible benefits:

- The study may help to improve the quality of delivery of both writing and subject specific courses at the university where it will be conducted.
- In a wider context, this study has been designed to contribute to the on-going debate on the pedagogy of writing in higher education.
- Participants may, if they wish, request a copy of the final report

#### The research participants will be randomly selected from:

- International students pursuing undergraduate degrees and studying in one of the universities of London.
- Writing tutors and faculty members teaching the participant students.

#### If you agree to take part in the study:

- You will agree that your writing classes will be observed and video-recorded twice a term (It is of my prime concern to make sure that each member of the group participating in your classes feels comfortable with the video-recording; therefore, the video will be positioned in such a way that those who do not wish to participate will not be covered. This will help to make sure that my presence and the recording process will not affect their education);
- You will participate in an interview each term (in total you will participate in 3 interviews of max 45 min each); during the interview you will be encouraged to discuss your perspective on the development of academic writing by international students, in particular with reference to students' literacy practices as possible factors enhancing their learning to write.
  - *The interviews will be conducted at the university, at a time convenient for you and in places easily accessible and comfortable for you (for example: empty classroom, a library resource room or a faculty member's office).*
  - *Provided that you give your consent, the interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.*

Any risks connected with the participation in the study:

- The participation in the study does not involve any risks.

Arrangements for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality:

- Your personal details will be anonymised.
- The personal details and conversion chart for the anonymisation will be kept separately from each other and from the data.
- Any names of persons or institutions will be deleted from the recording material and will not be disclosed in any written report of the research.

Informed consent and withdrawal:

- If you choose to take part in the study, you will be kindly asked to return a signed consent form before the study begins.
- You will be able to withdraw from the study by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, i.e. till the close of data collection.
- You will be able to withdraw his/her data from the study by the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, i.e. two weeks after the close of the data collection.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

Primary Researcher:

Weronika Górska  
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## Appendix 3.7 Information sheet for academic tutors

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR ACADEMIC TUTORS



REC Protocol Number: REP(EM)/08/09-86

### YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: **Development of Academic Writing by International Students**

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. The project is longitudinal and will last during the academic year of 2009/2010. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### The aims of the research are:

- To investigate how literacy practices undertaken by students enhance their learning of academic writing.
- To explore how students' literacy practices can inform the design of pedagogy for the teaching of writing at a university.
- To investigate staff's perception of the development of academic writing by students coming from linguistic and cultural backgrounds different to English.
- To critically scrutinize cross-cultural aspects of academic writing, with a particular focus on portability of genres and discourse strategies across cultures and disciplines.

#### Possible benefits:

- The study may help to improve the quality of delivery of both writing and subject specific courses at the university where it will be conducted.
- In a wider context, this study has been designed to contribute to the on-going debate on the pedagogy of writing in higher education.
- Participants may, if they wish, request a copy of the final report

#### The research participants will be randomly selected from:

- International students pursuing undergraduate degrees and studying in one of the universities of London.
- Writing tutors and faculty members teaching the participant students.

#### If you agree to take part in the study:

- You will give an interview (approx. 45 min) during which you will be encouraged to discuss your perspective on the development of academic writing by international students and in particular with reference to students literacy practices as possible factors enhancing their learning to write.
  - *The interviews will be conducted at the university, at a time convenient for you and in places easily accessible and comfortable for you (for example: empty classroom, a library resource room or a faculty member's office).*
  - *Provided that you give your consent, the interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder.*

#### Any risks connected with the participation in the study:

- The participation in the study does not involve any risks.

#### Arrangements for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality:

- Your personal details will be anonymised.
- The personal details and conversion chart for the anonymisation will be kept separately from each other and from the data.
- Any names of persons or institutions will be deleted from the recording material and will not be disclosed in any written report of the research.

#### Informed consent and withdrawal:

- If you choose to take part in the study, you will be kindly asked to return a signed consent form before the study begins.
- You will be able to withdraw from the study by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, i.e. till the close of data collection.

- You will be able to withdraw his/her data from the study by the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, i.e. two weeks after the close of the data collection.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

Primary Researcher:


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## Appendix 3.8 Consent form

<p><b>CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES</b></p> <p>Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.</p> <p><b>Title of Study:</b> Development of Academic Writing by International Students</p> <p>King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: REP(EM)/08/09-86</p> <p>Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.</li> <li>• <i>I understand that if I decide at any other time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and be withdrawn from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point of publication or up until the point stated on the Information Sheet.</i></li> <li>• <i>I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Participant's Statement:</b></p> <p>I _____</p> <p>agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.</p> <p>Signed _____ Date _____</p> <p><b>Researcher's Statement:</b></p> <p>I _____</p> <p>Confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the volunteer.</p> <p>Signed _____ Date _____</p>	
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## Appendix 3.9 Interview schedules for writing tutors

### Brief description & Guideline questions

#### Interview 1

The first interview with writing tutors was conducted at the beginning of data collection; its main aim was to get to know the tutors, find out about their teaching on the Pre-Masters Programme and learn about their perspectives on the teaching of academic writing and cooperation with academic tutors.

The interview was conversational and semi-structured in design. I prepared a set of points and associated with them questions, which I discussed with the tutors prior to the recording of the interview. During the interview the conversation progressed from general to specific points. The interview started with the first point on the schedule list, but then it unfolded in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily following a prescribed order.

1. Past experience / Former training
  - Do you write/publish in your discipline?
  - Have you attended any writing courses?
  - Have you had any training on teaching/evaluating writing in your discipline?
2. Writing assignments in your course(s)
  - What do students write in the writing classes?
  - How are the requirements for written assignments on the PMP presented?
  - What are your expectations of students' writing?
  - Why do you assign writing assignments?
  - Do you advise students to use any writing handbooks? Do you provide them with some materials that would guide them through the process of writing?
3. Working with the assignments / Evaluation
  - Do students submit first drafts or only final drafts?
  - What are your criteria for evaluation, and why?
  - How do students respond to these criteria?
  - While evaluating, are there any moments that make you think that a student is a user of English as a second language? Can you give examples?
  - What problems do students have with writing?
  - What do students enjoy about writing?
4. Feedback on student writing
  - How do students receive feedback on writing?
  - What do you focus on while giving feedback?
  - How much does each assignment count towards the final grade?
  - Does writing represent a student's knowledge on a given subject?
5. Writing classes / Writing in academic modules
  - What in your opinion is the role of writing classes?
  - What is the role of writing in subject courses?
  - Do writing classes support writing in subject courses?
  - Would you appreciate more assistance of academic tutors with regard to the teaching of academic writing?

## Interview 2

The second interview with writing tutors was conducted in the middle of data collection, usually after I conducted most of the planned observations. The main aim of this interview was to find out more about the observed sessions, clarify the teaching objectives, find out more details about the teaching materials, and establish to what extent writing tutors were preparing the materials independently and to what extent, or if at all, they cooperated with the academic tutors on the preparation of the teaching content in the writing classes.

The interview was conversational and semi-structured in design. I prepared a set of points and associated with them questions, which I discussed with the tutors prior to the recording of the interview. During the interview the conversation progressed from general to specific points. The interview started with the first point on the schedule list, but then it unfolded in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily following a prescribed order.

1. Teaching content in the writing classes in English Communication Module
  - Can you explain the teaching content of the session(s) that I have recently observed?
    - Do you often refer to subject content while discussing essay writing?
    - Is subject content important in improving one's writing ability?
    - Is reading an important element of preparation for writing? If yes, why?
    - When preparing students for exam writing, why do you focus on language use?
  - What motivated your choice of materials in the session(s) I have observed?
    - Do you devote much time in your writing classes to developing reading skills?
    - How do you prepare students to deal with academic reading?
  - Do you tailor your teaching to support student writing in academic modules?
    - What assists you in discerning what support students may need in writing for their academic modules?
  - Do you focus in your teaching exclusively on essay writing or do you include other genres?
    - Do you provide any support with, for example, report writing?
2. Cooperation with academic tutors
  - Do you cooperate with academic tutors to prepare your teaching in writing classes?
  - Would you welcome such opportunity if given?
  - In your opinion, which areas of writing support would be benefit from such cooperation?
3. Writing support in other support options offered to students on the PMP
  - Do pre-view/review classes offer any writing support?
  - Do you offer support with writing during academic tutorials?
4. Students' cultural and educational background
  - Do you draw in your teaching on students' background?
  - Is students' background of any importance/consideration in your teaching?

### Interview 3

The third interview with writing tutors was conducted at the end of data collection; its main purpose was to further discuss the teaching content of the writing classes as well as the issues related to the cooperation with academic tutors. The third interview was the shortest one, aimed mostly at a follow-up and clarification of the points discussed in interviews 1 and 2.

The interview was conversational and semi-structured in design. I prepared a set of points and associated with them questions, which I discussed with the tutors prior to the recording of the interview. During the interview the conversation progressed from general to specific points. The interview started with the first point on the schedule list, but then it unfolded in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily following a prescribed order.

1. Teaching content / materials
  - In your teaching do you follow the module syllabus?
  - What drives your decision making on the teaching content in writing classes?
  - In your opinion, which teaching materials work best, and why?
  - What helps you to diagnose students' needs?
2. Collaboration with academic tutors
  - Do you collaborate with other writing tutors in terms of teaching content?
  - Do you collaborate with academic tutors in terms of the teaching content?
  - If yes, how does this collaboration look like?
  - If no, would you welcome the opportunity to cooperate with other (writing/academic) tutors?
3. Writing support outside of writing classes
  - Lecture preparation/revision classes
    - What is your role in these classes?
    - Is there any writing-related content discussed in these classes? E.g. writing requirements in academic modules?
  - Personal tutorials
    - What is the role of personal tutorials?
    - Are there any writing related issues discussed during these meetings? If yes, then what do you discuss?
4. Feedback from students on the writing classes
  - Do students offer any (spoken or written) feedback on writing classes?
  - Do students find the writing classes useful in responding to the writing requirements in academic modules?

### Appendix 3.10 Interview schedule for academic tutors

#### **Brief description & Guideline questions**

The interview with academic tutors was conducted in term 3, towards the end of the data collection; its main aim was to get to know the tutors, find out about their teaching on the Pre-Masters Programme and learn about their perspectives on the teaching of academic writing and cooperation with writing tutors. I was in particular interested to find out about writing requirements, academic writing as form of the assessment, and options of writing support available to students.

The interview was conversational and semi-structured in design. I prepared a set of points and associated with them questions, which I discussed with the tutors prior to the recording of the interview. During the interview the conversation progressed from general to specific points. The interview started with the first point on the schedule list, but then it unfolded in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily following a prescribed order.

1. Capacity on the PMP
  - What is your role in the Pre-Masters Programme offered by the Language Centre?
2. Teaching on the PMP / general
  - What courses/modules do you teach?
  - How many contact hours per week do you have with PMP students?
3. Teaching on the IPMP / specific to a given module
  - When teaching your courses/modules, what do you focus on?
    - Is your focus on the course content only or do you also focus on some skills essential to successful completion of the course?
4. Assessment on your module
  - How do you assess students' knowledge in your course/module?
    - Quiz, essay, presentation, class participation?
5. Writing as a part of assessment on your module
  - Is writing a part of the assessment in your course/module?
    - Why does writing constitute a part of assessment?
    - What writing assignments are expected from PMP students in your course/module? Essay? Report?
    - How many assignments per term do PMP students write?
    - What is the weighting of these assignments in your course?
    - What are your expectation of student writing in your courses?
    - How do you communicate these expectations to students?
    - How are students informed about these writing requirements?
    - If you hand in to students any briefs describing assignment requirements, would it be possible to obtain from you a copy of these briefs?
    - Do you provide to students any help on academic writing?
      - E.g. do you spend a part of the class on explaining assignment requirements, answer students' questions, meet individual students to assist them with writing?
    - What are the assessment criteria that you use while evaluating students' writing?

- Do you evaluate each assignment following the same criteria or do the criteria depend on a given assignment? Illustrate your answers with examples, whenever appropriate.
  - How do you provide feedback to students?
  - Do you talk to students (either in class or individually) in order to explain your feedback in more details?
6. English Communication Modules: writing classes
- While studying on the PMP students take writing classes (as a part of English Communication component of the PMP) which focus on academic writing, reading, grammar and vocabulary. Do you think that these classes sufficiently prepare students for writing in your discipline? Justify your answer.
  - Do you collaborate with writing tutors with regard to writing support offered to students?
7. Personal details
- Can you briefly provide details of your academic and professional background?
    - What degrees do you hold?
    - What is your teaching experience?
    - How many years have you taught on the PMP?

## Appendix 3.11 Interview schedules for students

### Brief description & Guideline questions

#### Interview 1

The first interview with students was conducted at the beginning of data collection; its main aim was to get to know the students, find out about their academic background and learn about their writing, in particular how they understand the requirements, what supports them in their understandings (whether they attributed the support to writing tutors, academic tutors or advice they received in feedback), and finally how they respond the requirements of written assessment in their subject modules.

The interview was conversational and semi-structured in design. I prepared a set of points and associated with them questions, which I discussed with the students prior to the recording of the interview. During the interview the conversation progressed from general to specific points. The interview started with the first point on the schedule list, but then it unfolded in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily following a prescribed order.

1. Past experience / academic background
  - What is your educational background?
  - What is your experience as a writer in English?
  - What is your experience as a writer in your native language?
  - Have you attended any writing courses?
2. Writing assignment in your Subject Knowledge modules/academic modules
  - What kind of assignments do you write for your university courses?
  - How are the requirements presented?
  - Why do you have to write in your courses?
  - Do you use any writing handbooks or materials given by your tutors?
3. Working with the assignments / Responding to writing requirements
  - How do you compose your texts?
    - Take me through your process of writing
  - Are the criteria for evaluation of your writing clear to you while writing?
  - While writing does it happen to you to think that you are user of English as a second language? When? Can you give specific examples?
  - What problems do you have with writing?
  - What do you enjoy in writing?
4. Feedback
  - How do you receive feedback? Do you find it informative?
  - How much does each assignment count towards your final grade?
  - Does writing represent your knowledge on a given subject?
5. Writing classes / Writing in academic modules (compulsory and elective)
  - What in your opinion is the role of writing classes?
  - What is the role of writing in your courses?
  - Do writing classes support writing in your other courses?
  - Would you appreciate more assistance of writing tutors to work with you in your subject specific courses?

## Interview 2

The second interview with students was conducted in the middle of data collection, usually after students wrote and submitted their end-of-term assignments. The main aim of this interview was to find out how students respond to assignment requirements in their subject modules and to learn what supports them in their understandings (whether they attributed the support to writing tutors, academic tutors or advice they received in feedback).

The interview was conversational and semi-structured in design. I prepared a set of points and associated with them questions, which I discussed with the students prior to the recording of the interview. During the interview the conversation progressed from general to specific points. The interview started with the first point on the schedule list, but then it unfolded in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily following a prescribed order.

1. Development as a writer
  - How have you developed as a writer since we last talked?
2. Responding to writing requirements in academic modules (compulsory and elective)
  - Tell me about your assignments in term 2.
  - What were the requirements?
  - Were the requirements clear to you?
  - What did you do to respond to these requirements?
  - What was the process of writing?
  - Were you using what you learnt in writing classes?
  - Have you received any help with responding to the writing requirements?
3. Writing classes
  - Have the writing classes been helpful in writing these assignments?
  - Have you used any materials from the writing classes to support your writing in the academic modules? If yes, can you give examples?
4. Subject Knowledge/academic modules
  - Have you received any help from your academic tutors?
  - If yes, what help have you received?
  - Have academic tutors offered any writing support in their modules?

### Interview 3

The third interview with students was conducted in the end of data collection. The main aim of this interview was to follow-up on themes emerging from interviews 1 and 2. My main interest was in further exploring how students respond to assignment requirements in their subject modules and to learn what supports them in their understandings (whether they attributed the support to writing tutors, academic tutors or advice they received in feedback).

The interview was conversational and semi-structured in design. I prepared a set of points and associated with them questions, which I discussed with the students prior to the recording of the interview. During the interview the conversation progressed from general to specific points. The interview started with the first point on the schedule list, but then it unfolded in a conversational manner, covering all the points but without necessarily following a prescribed order.

#### 1. Writing requirements

- What type of writing is required from students on the Pre-Masters Programme?
- Are the requirements for writing in writing classes, compulsory module in Socio-Cultural Studies and your elective module (Global Politics, Commerce Administration or European Law) similar to one another or different?

#### 2. Responding to writing requirements

- Think of the assignments you wrote in the Pre-Masters Programme, and answer the following questions:
  - Were the requirements clear to you? Give examples.
  - What did you do in an attempt to answer these requirements?
- Approaching the task of writing. Comment on the following: 'This is what I do when I write a paper: I think of ideas, plan the paper, read the literature, write several drafts, use notes from writing classes, tips from subject tutors. Apart from all that, I talk to my friends, try to find some good examples, and I also ...'

#### 3. Writing support

- What support in writing have you received on the Pre-Masters Programme?
  - From writing tutors? From subject lecturers?
  - From preview/review tutors? From personal tutors?
  - From \_\_\_\_\_?

#### 4. Development as a writer

- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?
- Comment on the following: 'In the last year I have developed as a writer because I engaged in activities that assisted my writing.'

#### 5. Overall PMP experience

- What writing will you be required to do in the coming academic year in your Master's Programme? Are you ready for this new challenge?
- Last year at that time you were in your home country planning to come to the UK to study. What were key moments (both highs and lows) for you in this past year?
- What is your evaluation of the PMP? What have you enjoyed and what would you change? What would be your suggestions about writing support?



**Appendix 4.1 Transcription key for classroom observation data**

<b>S</b>	unidentified student speaking; students participating in interactions are numbered, e.g. S1, S2
<b>SS</b>	many students speaking at the same time
<b>(unclear)</b>	undecipherable
<b>(.)</b>	short pause
<b>(.8``)</b>	a pause of 8 seconds; the number of seconds may vary depending on the recording
<b>&gt;&gt;</b>	interruption at the end by the next participant in a conversation
<b>&lt;&lt;</b>	beginning of an utterance offered by an interrupting participant
<b>[ ]</b>	<i>[Nonverbal behaviour or transcriber's comments added for clarification purposes]</i>
<b>'<i>italicised word</i>'</b>	quotes from analysed sample texts are transcribed in inverted commas in italicised font style
<b>'word'</b>	examples of phrases and expressions thrown into the conversations are transcribed in inverted commas in regular font style

## Appendix 4.2 Session 1 with Tom - phase analysis

Writing tutor's pseudonym:	Tom
Date:	2010-02-09
Duration:	90':10''
Teaching materials:	Hand-out with SCS essay questions (see Appendix 4.4) and submission specifications

This session consisted of the following phases:

- 1) *Tutor welcoming the students*: Tutor welcomed arriving students and engaged in casual conversations. (1.5 min approx.)
- 2) *Tutor-led homework check of an exercise on linking words*: Tutor started checking homework given to students during the preceding session on the use of linking words in combining two clauses. Tutor elicited answers to the exercise by calling out linking words, e.g. however, furthermore, in contrast. Each time when a student answered, tutor provided feedback on the correctness of language use. (10 min approx.)
- 3) *Tutor setting-up pair work aimed at students' familiarising themselves with SCS essay questions for this term*: Tutor distributed a hand-out (see Appendix 4.4) with assignment titles for an end of term essay in Socio-Cultural Studies and instructed the students to read through the questions, ask for clarifications if needed, and discuss in pairs which of the topics they would like to choose for their term paper. (2 min approx.)
- 4) *Students working in pairs and checking their understanding of the SCS essay titles*: Students worked in pairs following the instructions given to them. Tutor walked around the classroom and joined pairs of students in their discussions. (6 min approx.)
- 5) *Tutor reuniting the class and explaining to the students the submission requirements for the SCS essay*: Tutor discussed in details formal submission requirements for the SCS assignments. The requirements were given to students in a hand-out. Tutor paid special attention to the explanation of what a draft was and what advantages were of submitting a well written draft. (6 min approx.)
- 6) *Tutor leading a discussion on how to develop an essay outline from an essay title*: Tutor discussed SCS assignment questions with students. Tutor works with the whole group explaining how to approach essay writing in SCS and how to develop an essay structure (10 min approx.)
- 7) *Tutor setting up pair-work and instructing the students to work on a chosen essay title in order to develop an outline*: Tutor instructed the students to work in pairs, choose an essay topic from the list provided in the hand-out and try to develop an essay outline. (2 min approx.)
- 8) *Students working in pairs on their essay outlines with tutor walking around the classroom and offering assistance if needed*: Students worked in pairs on their essay outlines. Tutor walked around the classroom and engaged in discussions with students. (30 min approx.)
- 9) *Tutor reuniting the class and offering feedback on students' attempts to write an essay outline*: Tutor gave feedback to the whole class on his observations regarding any issues that he observed that students had with developing an outline. (10 min approx.)
- 10) *Tutor setting up individual work on correction codes*: Tutor explained to students what a correction code is, guided the students through the first example in the exercise and instructed the students to do the exercise. (2 min approx.)
- 11) *Students working individually on the correction code exercise*: Students worked on the exercise practising the correction codes. (4 min approx.)
- 12) *Tutor reuniting the class and checking students' individual work*: Tutor reunited the class and checked the exercise on correction codes. (3 min approx.)
- 13) *Coda*: Tutor summed up the whole session and gave homework. (4 min approx.)

### Appendix 4.3 Session 2 with Tom – phase analysis

Writing tutor's pseudonym:	Tom
Date:	2010-04-30
Duration:	88:00
Teaching materials:	Hand-out with exam questions

This session consisted of the following phases:

- 1) *Tutor welcoming the students:* Tutor welcomed arriving students and distributed feedback on Academic Critique, a term assessment in writing classes in Term 2. Tutor answered students' questions regarding the feedback and asked students to keep the PMP convenor informed if they had received any offers to their MA applications. (4 min approx.)
- 2) *Tutor returning summary assignments to students:* Tutor discussed students' homework on summarising and paraphrasing sections from a research article; tutor gave a detailed feedback to one of the students who submitted her homework by email. (3 min approx.)
- 3) *Tutor responding to individual students' questions on issues with writing SCS essays:* Tutor asked what stage students were in their writing of the SCS essays and if they had any questions. A student asked questions about her Commerce Administration assignment on 'To what extent Game Theory is useful in Commerce Administration?'. Tutor engaged in a discussion on how to answer this question. Another student asked about her SCS essay on 'How valid are Enlightenment ideas for a non-western world?'. Tutor again engaged in a discussion on how to answer this question. Tutor provided some additional explanations related to the submission of essays and deadlines. Tutor commented on the use of in-text citations, long quotes and paraphrasing. (41 min approx.)
- 4) *Tutor-led discussion on how to develop a SCS essay from an essay title:* Tutor wrote on the whiteboard an example essay question: 'Animals should have the same rights as humans. Discuss.' and then guided the students through the stages of essay writing: understanding the question, brainstorming ideas, developing an outline, signalling one's position. (20 min approx.)
- 5) *Tutor setting up pair-work asking students to develop essay outlines from essay titles:* Tutor distributed examples of exam questions relevant to a compulsory module of Socio-Cultural Studies, as well to elective modules of Commerce Administration, European Law, and Global Politics. Tutor had created a hand-out with these questions by downloading exam papers from previous years from BA/MA programmes at one of London universities. Students were asked to choose and discuss two exam questions. (12 min approx.)
- 6) *Tutor setting up homework asking students to write an exam essay under timed conditions:* Tom asked students to write a timed essay either choosing one question one question for the list or suggesting their own question. Tom asked students to bring anything related to their SCS essay for next week. (6 min approx.)
- 7) *Coda:* Tutor summed up the session. (2min approx.)

**Appendix 4.4 Hand-out: Assignment titles for Socio-Cultural Studies**

Note: the original module name has been deleted from the hand-out for the anonymisation purposes

Term Two	Assignment
Pre-Masters Programme 2009-2010	
This assignment is worth <u>20%</u> of your overall mark	
Write an essay of <u>1,250-1,500 words</u> on <u>one</u> of the following questions.	
1 Which of the two paradigms (competitive and dominance) more accurately expresses the nature of journalism in this country?	
2 In your opinion, which country has the best political system, and why?	
3 What valid criticisms can be made of liberal democracy?	
4 To what extent can New Labour be said to be the inheritors of Thatcherism?	
5 To what extent can science and religion coexist?	
6 'As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see "the River Tiber foaming with much blood."' Was Enoch Powell right?	
7 Do the advantages of immigration outweigh the disadvantages?	
8 To what extent do you agree with Karl Marx's theory of history?	
9 Many institutions still use a hierarchical system of organisation. Is this model outmoded or is it still valid in the early 21 <sup>st</sup> century?	
10 How valid is the distinction often made between sex (a biological fact) and gender (a social construct)?	
11 How valid are traditional religious views of sexuality and to what extent can they be reconciled with a pluralist liberal society?	

**Appendix 4.5 Session with Sue – phase analysis**

Writing tutor's pseudonym:	Sue
Date:	2010-05-21
Duration:	91':00''
Teaching materials:	Hand-out (see Appendix 4.6) prepared by Sue, listing sentences from students' timed writing.

The session consisted of the following phases:

- 1) *Welcome*: Tutor welcomed arriving students and engaged in casual conversations with them. (2 min approx.)
- 2) *Tutor returns feedback on timed-writing*: Tutor returned to students their timed-writing with her feedback and corrections and asked students to spend a few minutes looking through the feedback comments. Some of the students took this opportunity to ask clarifying questions. (7 min approx.)
- 3) *Individual/pair-work set-up*: Tutor distributed to students the hand-out (see Appendix 4.6) with a selection of problematic sentences from their timed-writing and asked students work individually or in pairs on the correction of first ten sentences. (1 min approx.)
- 4) *Individual/pair work on the correction of sentences*: Students engaged in the correction of the first ten sentences from the hand-out. The preference was for the individual work. (3 min approx.)
- 5) *Tutor-led corrections*: Tutor reunited the class and engaged in a tutor-led corrections of the sentences in the hand-out. Tutor guided the students through the correction process and typed the corrected version of the sentences on the computer which projected the image onto the whiteboard (see Appendix 4.7). (68 min approx.)
- 6) *Individual work set-up*: Tutor asked the students to choose two or three points that they would like to learn for their own writing in order to improve their writing skills. (1 min approx.)
- 7) *Individual work*: Students worked individually on improving the grammatical correctness of their prose; tutor offered any needed advice to those students who request it. (8 min approx.)
- 8) *Coda*: Tutor summed up key points of the session. (1 min approx.)

**Appendix 4.6 Hand-out: Problematic sentences - students' exam responses**Sentences from this week's work.

It's principle was the equal rights between the two sexes.

They started their movement in the last of 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

Nowadays poverty appears in everywhere.

Absolute poverty is insufficient of having main factors for human beings.

Some countries can not have enough water for drinking because of climate change.

It might be causes of poverty.

Is this growth concern individuals or the mankind?

They are able to trade on markets by themselves.

Profits are spreaded to owners and shareholders.

The bad governance might be the majority causes of poverty in the country.

Money which should spend on develop the country and improve citizen's life.

They work hardly to solve this problem.

They drink water with the mud.

Not only the people loss their life, but also the government loss huge money.

The gap between the rich country and the poor country is much further.

People all prefer to living in rich countries and enjoying higher living standards.

There still have huge amounts of people living in poverty.

Africa is the most poverty area in the world.

It always lack of food.

Secondly, because of many reasons such as religion and old grudge. This land is full of war.

People believe that states, which are suffering from poverty are guilty for it.

There is a high rate of poverty all over the world.

As a result of poverty there is a high rate of crime.

In the world there are so many kinds of poverty and those poverty caused by a various of different reasons.

When we suffer the recession of the economy, there are plenty of citizens lose their jobs.

There are lots of people hurted by disaster.

The first point is related with the abolition of land ownership.

Firstly, rising of food prices leads to poverty.

Some scientist are believed that poverty is one of the main problems in the modern world.

They are supposed that countries where people are poor has a negative effect to wealthy countries.

First of all, it is economic cause of poverty.

## Appendix 4.7 Possible corrections – students' exam responses

### Possible corrections

- 1) Its principle was equal rights between the sexes  
Sexual equality was the primary feminist goal.
- 2) At the end of the Seventeenth Century.  
This movement started in the late seventeenth century.
- 3) Most countries, developed or developing, have some levels of poverty. These can be divided into
- 4) Absolute poverty means the condition whereby a lack of basic needs exist, such as food, clean water and housing.
- 5) Some scientists argue that climate change can lead to drought and desertification.
- 6) One cause of poverty is...
- 7) Does this growth most concern individuals or society?
- 8) Trade is free and without government intervention.
- 9) Free Trade and lack of government intervention is an important aspect of Capitalism.
- 10) Profits are distributed/ shared between...
- 11) Bad governance might be an/ one of the most important causes of poverty.
- 12) Money should be spent on developing .....citizens' lives
- 13) Solutions have been sought by governments; however,
- 14) They drink dirty water
- 15) Not only do people lose their lives, but governments also lose huge amounts of money
- 16) The poverty gap is widening, particularly in countries such as...
- 17) There are still huge numbers of people...
- 18) Africa is the poorest continent in the world, in terms of GDP and living conditions.
- 19) Famine is prevalent / common in many parts of the world, for example in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- 20) 'Old grudges'
- 21) Bearing grudges- don't bear a grudge
- 22) Some people argue that poverty is the fault of the country itself while others feel that rich countries are more responsible.
- 23) Poverty can cause higher crime rates.
- 24) There is often a correlation between poverty and crime
- 25) Economic recession often leads to increased unemployment.
- 26) Firstly, the abolition of land ownership caused...  
Food price rises can put pressure on people financially

### Appendix 4.8 Session 1 with Peter – phase analysis

Writing tutor's pseudonym:	Peter
Date:	2010-01-25
Duration:	89':10''
Teaching materials:	Two hand-outs with two examples of an academic critique written by students in previous year. (see Appendices 4.12 and 4.13)

This session consisted of the following phases:

- 1) *Introduction to the session content*: Tutor-led explanation of the teaching focus of the session; tutor stated that the class would cover analysis of text structure and the use of vocabulary; tutor would also return students' homework. (1 min approx.)
- 2) *Pair-work set-up*: Tutor set up pair work and instructed the students to discuss examples of critiques by focusing on a) the text structure and the use of linking words with regard to linking ideas, b) referencing conventions, c) language chunks that might be useful for students in expressing criticality in writing. (6 min approx.)
- 3) *Pair-work*: Students discussed the examples of the critique. In this activity Peter interrupted the pair-work twice by addressing the whole class regarding a) possible language mistakes in the examples, and b) whether the students were clear on how to progress with the pair-work. (12 min approx.)
- 4) *Whole class discussion of the examples of student critiques*: Tutor-lead discussion that aimed at checking what students found out regarding a) the use of linking words with regard to linking ideas, b) referencing conventions, c) language chunks that might be useful for students in expressing criticality in writing. In this activity Peter changed the focus once by digressing and giving course-organisation information regarding students' support from the programme convenor. (39 min approx.)
- 5) *Question & Answer*: Tutor-led Q&As regarding the two examples discussed in this class. (3 min approx.)
- 6) *Pair-work set-up*: Tutor instructed the students to work in pairs and to peer-review their summaries which they had given as homework for today's session (1 min approx.)
- 7) *Pair-work*: students discussed in pairs their summaries. (20 min approx.)
- 8) *Pair-work feedback*: Tutor-led feedback and Q&As regarding students' summaries. (7min approx.)
- 9) *Coda*: Tutor summed up the session. (1 min approx.)



## Appendix 4.9 Session 2 with Peter – phase analysis

Writing tutor's pseudonym:	Peter
Date:	2010-01-26
Duration:	88':58''
Teaching materials:	Hand-outs: two articles presenting contrasting views on drug testing by pharmaceutical companies

This session consisted of the following phases:

- 1) *Introduction to the session*: Tutor-led explanation of the focus of the session; tutor explained that the session would consist of a) students reporting on their progress with critique writing, and b) reading and discussing two articles that present contrasting points of view in the area of Pharmaceutical Studies. (1 min approx.)
- 2) *Set-up for the individual work focused on students writing their outlines*: Tutor instructed students to work individually and put on paper their initial ideas regarding their critiques. (1 min approx.)
- 3) *Individual writing*: Students worked individually on their first drafts. (8 min approx.)
- 4) *Tutor-led explanation on audience in critique writing*: As a follow up to students' individual writing of their first drafts, tutor explained to the students the importance of considering the audience in critique writing. (3 min approx.)
- 5) *Tutor-led discussion on students work on the critiques*: Tutor asked individual students to share their experience of working thus far on their critiques; he nominated students to share their progress with assignment writing and describe their ways of engaging with critique writing focusing, in particular, on critical reading. (12 min approx.)
- 6) *Pair-work set-up*: Tutor introduced the topic of pharmaceutical companies, elicited from students the names of pharmaceutical companies and gave instructions on pair-work. (2 min approx.)
- 7) *Pair-work*: Students discussed processes involved in drug development. (3 min approx.)
- 8) *Tutor-led discussion on drug development process*: As a follow up to the pair-work, tutor engaged in a discussion with the students on the processes and controversies involved in the drug testing process. (3 min approx.)
- 9) *Individual reading set-up*: Tutor divided the class into two groups, gave each group a different article on drug testing by pharmaceutical companies and instructed students on what to pay attention to while reading. (6 min approx.)
- 10) *Silent reading*: Students read the articles in silence. (11 min approx.)
- 11) *Small group discussion set-up*: Tutor organised the students in small groups and gave instructions on how to proceed with a discussion on a given article. (2 min approx.)
- 12) *Small group discussions*: Students discussed the content of a given article. (10 min approx.)
- 13) *Pair-work set-up*: Tutor asked students to form pairs comprising of students who each read a different article and to critically discuss both articles. (1 min approx.)
- 14) *Pair-work*: Students discussed the articles with the focus on a) reporting the content, and b) signalling possible opposing positions. (10 min approx.)
- 15) *Tutor-led explanation of positions taken in both articles*: Tutor initially asked students to report to him on their pair-work, but as the students kept silent, the tutor proceeded to offer the explanation himself with no input from the students. (10 min approx.)
- 16) *Coda*: Tutor summed up the session and pre-empted the content of the next session. (1 min approx.)

### Appendix 4.10 Session 3 with Peter – phase analysis

Writing tutor's pseudonym:	Peter
Date:	2010-01-29
Duration:	89':20''
Teaching materials:	Sample critique with feedback sheet

This session consisted of the following phases:

- 1) *Introduction to the session:* Tutor outlined the content of the session and gave information to his tutees regarding the upcoming tutorials. (1 min approx.)
- 2) *Pair-work set-up aimed for homework check:* Tutor asked the students to work in pairs and to review the outlines of their critiques, which was students' homework for this session. (1.5 min approx.)
- 3) *Pair-work:* Students worked in pairs discussing their outlines; tutor walked around the class and joined the students adding to their discussions; about 10 min into the pair-work the tutor addressed the whole class reminding the students that in their critiques they needed to clarify who the author of the reviewed article was and who the author of the critique was. (30 min approx.)
- 4) *Tutor-led discussion on common issues students experienced while planning their critiques:* Tutor addressed the whole class a) focusing on the use of formal academic vocabulary, b) advising the students not to critique the language use in the articles they had chosen to critique, and c) suggesting that the students should be critical in their choices regarding what to cover in their critiques. (7 min approx.)
- 5) *Pair-work set-up:* Tutor asked the students to discuss in pairs what, in their opinion, an introduction of the critique would consist of; one of the students interjected the pair-work set up process and asked about the use of headings the critique; tutor offered a brief explanation and instructed the students to begin pair discussions. (2 min approx.)
- 6) *Pair work:* Students discussed in pairs the content of the introduction. (5 min approx.)
- 7) *Tutor-led explanation of the content of the introduction of critique:* tutor reunited the class and elicited from them their ideas on what an introduction includes; tutor wrote the ideas on the whiteboard; tutor discussed students' ideas with the whole class. (17 min approx.)
- 8) *Individual work set-up:* Tutor distributed to students a sample critique and asked them to read it and analyse its text structure. (2 min approx.)
- 9) *Individual work:* Students read and worked silently. (2 min approx.)
- 10) *Tutor-led discussion regarding the content and the text structure of the critique:* Tutor talked the students through the content and text structure of the critique. (2 min approx.)
- 11) *Individual work set-up:* Tutor asked students to read through the sample critique again highlighting instances of the use of linking words and the use of reporting verbs. (1 min approx.)
- 12) *Individual work:* Students read and worked silently. (3 min approx.)
- 13) *Tutor-led discussion on the use of linking words and reporting verbs in the sample critique:* Tutor discussed with the students the use of linking words in building a coherent structure and the use of reporting verbs in presenting the author's stance; occasionally the tutor attracted the students' attention to the use of evaluative language. (6 min approx.)
- 14) *Tutor-led discussion on feedback:* Tutor distributed to students the feedback that the sample critique had received, and he engaged in a discussion with the students on the feedback. (4 min approx.)
- 15) *Coda:* Tutor summed up the session and answered any other questions the students had. (6 min approx.)

## Appendix 4.11 Hand-out: Critique writing - Academic article

### **Critique Writing: Academic Article**

#### **Source**

Where and when was the article published?

Who are the authors? What are their academic affiliations?

What is the name of the journal or book? Has it been peer-reviewed?

#### **Main Idea**

What does the title mean?

Is there an abstract? What information can you gain from it?

How about the introduction and/or the conclusion?

Is there a list of key words?

What kind of paper is it? (e.g. research-based, review of the field, comment, response to another article)

What is the main idea of the article?

Can you find the thesis statement? How might you re-phrase this?

#### **Organisation**

How has the article been organised?

How many different sections and sub-sections are there? What are they? How has the author connected these sections?

#### **Research**

What kind of methodology has been used in this paper?

What are the main results of the study?

What is the overall conclusion of the study?

#### **Opinion**

What do you think of this paper/research?

What evidence does the author provide? How rigorous do you think the research is?

How might it have been improved?

How useful or relevant do you think this paper might be for your future studies?

#### **References**

How many references are there in the reference list?

What types of sources have been used in the paper? Do these seem academic to you?

**Appendix 4.12 Hand-out: Example critique 'Jordan'**

A critical analysis of the article "Attitudes of Jordanian University Students towards using online chat discourse with native speakers of English for improving their language proficiency"

This paper will discuss the strengths and certain weaknesses of the article "Attitudes of Jordanian university students towards using online chat discourse with native speakers of English for improving their language proficiency" by Mahfouz and Ihmeideh published in Computer Assisted Language in 2009. I do agree with the researchers on the positive effects of SCMC on language learners' proficiency, however there are some non mentioned data and a possible uncontrolled factor which need to be scrutinized. In order to do so, firstly a brief summary will be given to outline the main idea of the article, afterwards I will mention the positive aspects regarding the structure and referencing which will be followed by reviewing the methodology and participants as well as the external factors and the final result.

According to Mahfouz and Ihmeideh in Computer Assisted Language Learning (2009) using video and text chat discourse with anonymous native speakers of English is beneficial to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills respectively. Moreover some factors such as their gender, faculty, and the chat messenger mode they use as well as their seniority of study at university highly affect the result of research. The data was gathered by administrating some questionnaire to 320 university students of two Jordanian universities selected randomly among those who used chat frequently. The aim of the research was to answer the two following questions:

- 1) What are Hashemite University and Faculty of Educational Science (FES) student's points of view towards the effects of online chatting with native speaker on their English proficiency?
- 2) Are the variables of gender, faculty, messenger mode, and seniority making any significant difference between students view towards using online chatting to improve their English proficiency?

Regarding the structure, there is a good introduction which includes some background information such as describing the existing situation and the context of the research as well as some previous studies in the same area which all of them have provided with a correct referencing.

In addition, the authors have mentioned the reasons which distinguish and separate this study from the previous ones. There is a good definition about online chat discourse to make it clear what exactly they mean by using "SCMC" That is to say, instant messaging (IM), audio and video chat.

Furthermore there is a quite completely related literature review with appropriate in text referencing all shows positive attitudes of the students which support the result of the present research. The only contradiction in studies' results is that of Abuseileek's (2007) which concludes that SCMC improves only learners aural and oral language skills rather than all four skills. There is another contradiction when focusing on the role of gender in the final result which all previous studies denied that whereas according to this article it can be significantly effective to have a different result. However it is not clear whether all these studies were similar to this one in terms of the number of students, the context and situation, the methodology, other external factors and especially the time period that the studies were done, the only difference that has been mentioned is that, all other studies were limited in a classroom and under a supervision of a language instructor whereas this article has investigated the effects of online chatting which enable students to talk freely with native speakers about different topics out of classroom schedule.

Since this research studies the effects of online chatting with native speakers on language learners proficiency and the researchers emphasise on having accurate information of the language such as pronunciation, varied writing style as well as accurate grammatical competence for a native speaker, there is no controlling factor in this research that can guarantee the extent of accuracy of the information of the language used by the native speakers, as not all styles used by them are standard, the same is true about writing style especially when one of the questions asks whether it is a good

idea to accept some abbreviations and other styles-which are different from the standard forms- in language?

Regarding the methodology, the researchers provided a questionnaire to collect data. Although the validity and the reliability of them were even double checked both by students and some judges, this method is a self report which according to Sudman (1977) are not always reliable. The result would be more reliable if the researchers reviewed those data which was collected in another method as well. For example there is another study in the same area by Al-Jarf 2004 under the title of "The effects of web-based learning on struggling EFL college writers" which has been done using an experimental method (pre-test and post-test) to measure students language skills improvement, otherwise as an example, in this research there is no scale to measure the extent of improvement.

Moreover the research has done during one semester which might not be an adequate period of time to have an accurate result. Adding to these, the study has been done by administrating the questionnaire to the students who were selected randomly, the fact is that the participants were those who used online chatting frequently which seems to contradict the random selection and no reason has been mentioned for choosing them.

Finally they conclude that gender is another factor which can affect the final result, this conclusion is in contradiction to the previous studies in which, gender is a neutral factor. In this regard it could be mention that other external factors such as some background cultures as well as some stereo types might be involved either.

To sum up, this paper discussed some positive aspects of the mentioned article by referring to its well organized structure which includes an appropriate introduction as well as a related literature review with accurate referencing both in-text and at the end. Providing suitable and clear definition of some concepts is another strength points of the study, the second part of the paper dealt with some weaknesses such as uncontrolled factors, the

methodology and participants as well as other possible non mentioned external factors.

### Referencing

Al-Jarf R. 2004 The effects of web-based learning on struggling EFL college writers, *Foreign Language Annals*,

Bradburn M. Sudman S. Wansik B. 1997 *Asking Questions* , Jossey-Bass

Mahfouz S.M. Ihmeideh F.M. 2009 Attitudes of Jordanian university students towards using online chat discourse with native speakers of English to improve their language proficiency, *Computer Assisted Language Learning* Vol 22.



### Appendix 4.13 Hand-out: Example critique ‘Amartya Sen’

[1] Amartya Sen Critique [Introduction and Summary Sections]

This is the summary section on a critique written by a student on a pre-session language course. The critique is presented here as the student wrote it, with only some grammatical corrections. There remain some errors with language.

#### SAMPLE CRITIQUE

Reference: *“The Importance of Democracy”*. Sen, Amartya: *DEVELOPMENT AS FREEDOM*. Oxford University Press 2001. Pages 146-159. Amartya Sen is the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and the winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Science. He has taught at Calcutta, Delhi, Oxford, Cambridge, The London School of Economics and Harvard.

During the last fifteen years have had a new theoretical discussion about the concept of development and, which are the best strategies to reduce poverty and improve access to basic services such as health, education and social security? The increasing concern related to these topics is a product of two situations: poverty has increased in the last twenty years and economic growth has not always been accompanied by a reduction of inequalities and more access to basic services. The theory presented by Amartya Sen in the book *“Development as Freedom”* is a new approach to this discussion and the chapter *“The importance of democracy”* provides analysis of the role of democracy in development.

There is a theoretical and political discussion about a dichotomy between economic needs and political freedoms. In the chapter *“The importance of democracy”*, Sen presents the idea that this conflict is not real. He argues that evidence does not show this dichotomy, because there are not systematic empirical studies, which support the idea of civil liberties in developing countries interfering with economic growth and development. Additionally, the author analyses that the common “helpful” policies used to increase economic growth, for instance, openness to competition, high levels of literacy and enrolment rates in schools, successful land reforms, and public provision of incentives for investment, and he indicates that these are not exclusive actions of authoritarian countries (China, Singapore and other East Asian countries), because many democratic nations have applied them. Finally, Sen claims that evidence shows that people in poor nations fight for their civil liberties (e.g., African countries and Asian nations as South Korea, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Burma).



[1] Amartya Sen Critique [Introduction and Summary Sections]

The main focus of the argument is that "developing and strengthening a democratic system is an essential component of the process of development" (Page 157). The author presents three virtues of democracy, namely, its direct or intrinsic importance, its instrumental importance, and its constructive role in the creation of values and norms. The first one is that

civil liberties are a basic capability, because these liberties permit social and political participation. The second one is the opportunity to express and support demands on public services and economic rights. Sen argues that a free speech is necessity to express publicly people needs, demand attention and complain about social problems. The third virtue is the importance of guaranteeing public discussions, debates, criticism and dissent about conceptualization and comprehension of economics needs.

Finally, the chapter argues that the practice of democratic and political rights is crucial. This system provides a set of opportunities, rules and procedures; its achievements depend on the way these opportunities are used by citizens, especially the persistence of opposition.

[2] Amartya Sen Critique [Evaluation Section]

**You have already been given the introduction and summary to a sample critique written by a student.**

**This is the evaluation section.**

- i) Underline the verbs (including reporting verbs) that you think are useful to remember for your own work**
- ii) From the introduction, summary and evaluation, what do you think the conclusion might say?**

In general, Sen presents a brief and concise vision of democracy as one of the central points of development. This chapter is an excellent introduction, which is the first step in the discussion of political systems and development. Furthermore, the author goes to the central point about importance of democracy: freedom to express ideas and to complain of difficult situations. The capability to participate and to be part of a community is always an opportunity of a joint development, which would be more sustainable.

The arguments against the vision of economic development and civil liberties are strong and ingenious. He is capable of demonstrating that the theory of a dichotomy is a biased version without evidence. The chapter presents many examples of countries where the concern about economic needs is accompanied by the claim of political freedoms; consequently a nation in a development process needs to work in to enhance its democracy and to fulfil of necessities alike.

On the other hand, Sen shows not only the general idea about the importance of democracy, but he also indicates different forms to expand or improve capabilities with the use of civil liberties. The main propose is the activism of opposition parties. In a democratic system parties are an important force, which put pressure on the government to provide solutions of social

[2] Amartya Sen Critique [Evaluation Section]

problems and scrutinise the public policies, avoiding corruption and other drawbacks.

Sen's vision of development goes beyond the common economic theory. It is an analysis that considers economic impacts of political decisions. However, despite this contribution, other issues need to be taken into consideration: What are the problems of democratic systems, especially in developing countries? And, how is it possible to solve these problems? The chapter mentions some drawbacks of democracy but they are not developed into the argument. As a result it is rather a one-sided vision of democracy against other forms of government rather than a critical vision of democracy.

Frequently democracy is seen as the ideal political system, but a discussion about its drawbacks is necessary. There are three general issues about democracy relate with the virtues presented by Sen, which he does not discuss: (i) How the press works, (ii) Does the capability of social and political participation always exist in a democracy? And (iii) do the parties represent the interest of the community?

Firstly, how "the fourth" power works in some democratic nations. Nowadays, free press and the option of express dissatisfaction about extreme situation (famines or radical exclusion) help to focus the general attention on these problems. However, circumstances not so extreme than famines, for example, nutrition problems in some areas of the country, difficult access to health services, and illiteracy to name a few drawbacks, they are not an attractive issue for press. Newspapers or television seldom see these situations as news. A result of the lack of interest about these topics, there are few actions to solve them. Frequently, these situations are structural problems, which need a strong and urgent solution to avoid an extreme situation later.

[2] Amartya Sen Critique [Evaluation Section]

Recent democracies such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and the Slovak Republic, have a numerous marginalized communities. The Roma<sup>1</sup> Human Development Report 2003 shows that four to five million people in the region suffer living conditions close to those of sub-Saharan Africa in terms of illiteracy, infant mortality and malnutrition. Therefore, one of the conclusions of this report is that if these nations postpone the solutions for marginalized groups, the human security cost will be enormous (political extremism and regression of the democratic process).

Secondly, the capability to participate is not only a right but also is a duty. It can be argued that if the general attention did not focus on some economic needs, people would use democratic mechanisms to complain about their urgent problems. This argument could be a fallacy, because who has to complain? Actually, poor people without information, in an extreme case illiterate citizens. How can they do this? Are they really prepared to do it? People with low levels of education, who lack of information, they are not able to participate into a democratic system or take advantage of it. The capability of participation needs to be built. Citizens have to learn how participate and to be prepared to do it.

Finally the third problem is that Sen overestimates the importance of opposition parties. In a representative democracy, the political parties are organized groups of people with similar interests and propose of policies for the development of their country. In recent years, in some nations are difficult to distinguish between parties, because the general ideas are similar. Therefore, when there are not a really opposition, other mechanisms of participation are necessary. The chapter would have been more effective if the author had offered more detail about other mechanisms of democracy, and explored other propose additional to opposition parties. Additionally, a strong opposition parties can represent not the common interest, then the results would be more terrible than in a democracy without it. For instance, in Venezuela, a democratic nation with a

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<sup>1</sup> Romany is a gypsy community

## [2] Amartya Sen Critique [Evaluation Section]

strong opposition party, which won the last election, now they are in serious economic, social and political crisis and Chavez<sup>2</sup> has become more and more authoritarian.

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<sup>2</sup> Chavez is the President of Venezuela.



## Appendix 4.14 Academic critique - Assignment brief

### International Premasters Programme

#### English Language Coursework (Writing): Critique

As part of your English language assessment on the International Premasters Programme, you are required to submit a piece of written coursework in Term 2. This year, you are asked to write a *critique*. This critique will form 15% of your final mark on the Academic English module. (Please see p. 48-49 in your handbook for more information.)

#### Introduction

Briefly, a critique is a critical evaluation of an academic article or book that you have read and includes a brief synopsis (or summary) of the article, as well as your own assessment of the arguments contained within the article in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, and your own opinion. It is important for you to learn how to evaluate the texts and arguments that you read and how to express your opinion of what you have read when you write assignments in your undergraduate degree studies. The critique will be marked by your Writing tutor, using the English Language Centre marking Criteria.

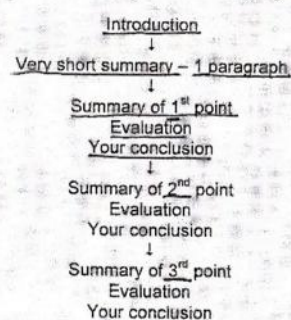
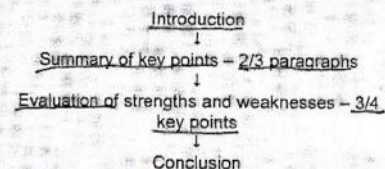
You will be given help on the structure and language required in a critique in your writing classes, and will look at example critiques for guidance.

#### Structure

Your critique will include the following sections:

- Introduction
- Summary
- Key points in the text for discussion
- Evaluation of key points (strengths/weaknesses of arguments)
- Conclusion(s)

Possible structures for your critique might be as follows:



You will look at these further in your writing classes.

Please turn over

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

Submission deadline: **2pm, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February** submitted via **turnitin**

Word limit: **1,500 words**

1. Assignments **MUST** be submitted via **turnitin** **NO LATER THAN 2PM on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February**. Late assignments will be penalised and receive a low mark or zero.
2. All assignments should be word-processed using **Times Roman font size 12 and double-spaced** on A4 paper and the pages should be numbered
3. Your **name, the date, the module title** (Academic English / Writing Coursework / Critique) and the **title of the assignment** (including the book or article critiqued) should be clearly written on the **front page**.
4. A bibliography of all the references you have used in your assignment should be included at the **end of your assignment**. (*Guidelines on Citing and Referencing* are given on pages 23-29 in the appendices of your handbook.)
5. If you have a **very good** reason for not finishing your assignment on time, you must ask your module lecturer **IN ADVANCE** for an extension. **Extensions cannot be given after the deadline**. It is up to the module lecturer to decide whether you can be given an extension.

Note: I received the brief for the writing of the critique from one of the students, and any marks in the section of the brief presented in Appendix 4.14 and in Figure 4.4 were made by that student. The tutor did not have a spare critique brief to offer me. I discussed such issues related to the data collection in my Methodology Chapter 3

## Appendix 7.1 Annotation key for student essays data

***Bold italics font style*** Bold italicised font style is used to highlight rhetorical devices identified in the student text. The rhetorical devices, considered for analysis, include: ‘transitions’, ‘frame markers’, ‘evidentials’, ‘hedges’, ‘demonstrative markers’.

**[rhetorical move]** Bold font style insertion in square brackets is used to name rhetorical moves identified in the student text. The insertion follows the move. The rhetorical moves, considered for analysis, include: ‘information move’, ‘proposition move’, ‘gambit move’, ‘claim move’, ‘support move’, ‘consolidation move’, ‘affirmation move’, ‘close move’.

This annotation is used only in examples included in Chapter 7 and not in Appendices 7.2 -7.5.

***/rhetorical device/*** Bold italicised font style insertion in front slashes is used to name a rhetorical device identified in the student text.

This annotation is used only in the full texts of students’ essays included in Appendices 7.2 - 7.5.



## Appendix 7.2 Luana's GP essay

*Essay topic:* Do you think that the metaphor used by Kagan comparing US to Mars and the EU to Venus is accurate characterization of the state of transatlantic relations in the XXI century? Discuss your answer.

GP Essay text	Rhetorical moves
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	
<p>With the end of World War II the United States was the key factor to help reconstruct Europe economically (<i>Hitchcock, 2003</i>) /evidentials/. The implementation of the Warsaw Pact to ensure security against Soviet Union and also through military alliance, with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, initiate a partnership that now has been questioned (<i>Ibid</i>) /evidentials/. The bilateral power structure that shaped International Relations until that point dismantled, giving place for a unilateral structure started defining the US as a superpower nation (<i>Wohlforth, 1999</i>) /evidentials/. While the US becomes much stronger now, its perspective becomes more centralised (<i>Kagan, 2003</i>) /evidentials/. Meanwhile Europe becomes weaker and it starts pursuing prosperity and peace through multilateral attitude towards the world of law and rules.</p> <p><i>In that matter</i> /transitions/, <i>Kagan (2003)</i> /evidentials/ do have a strong point that is accurate about the divergences between EU and US in the XXI century as both have different interests, follows different philosophy's and do not share the same status as global actors (<i>Burwell and Daalder, 1999</i>) /evidentials/. <i>However</i> /transitions/, there are still relevant bilateral trade relations such as the economic partnership between them (<i>Burwell and Daalder, 1999</i>) /evidentials/ and also the common security interests to ensure peace and democracy worldwide through NATO (<i>NATO, 2009</i>) /evidentials/.</p>	<p><i>Information:</i> presents background information and contextualises the topic</p> <p><i>Gambit:</i> problematises the topic</p>
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	
<p><i>This essay will discuss</i> /frame markers/ the transatlantic relation between US and EU pending to the divergences of strategic and solidarity views specially in the Middle East (<i>Lindberg, 2005</i>) /evidentials/. <i>In the same time</i> /transitions/, <i>this essay will also point out</i> /frame markers/ the importance of European and American alliance besides any difference of character and style to deal with problems and results.</p> <p><i>Beginning with</i> /frame marker/ describing the past situation of Europe and the present perseverance of stability and peace in opposition of the new hegemonic role of the US, I will draw the basis of the new transatlantic relations. <i>Secondly</i> /frame markers/, this essay will focus on the different responses towards XXI global security issues and the different perspective that each has by the acknowledgement of EU's inability of political power versus US's strong character in political measures with military enforcement, such as in Iraq war (<i>Cox, 2005</i>) /evidentials/, in opposition of EU willingness to engage with the war and the absence of using military force. <i>Thirdly</i> /frame markers/, the new character of relation will be observed much more by economical character (<i>Bretherton and Vogler, 1999</i>) /evidentials/. <i>Finally</i> /frame markers/ the decreasing status of NATO will restate the absence of security engagement and asymmetrical</p>	<p><i>Proposition:</i> defines the topic and gives the focus to the essay; indicates the author's position</p> <p><i>Marker:</i> identifies a list of issues to be covered in the essay</p>

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compromise between those two important economic partners, both still rely in each other as allies.

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### Paragraph 3

The US and EU transatlantic relation do not occupy the same world anymore; neither share the same perspective (*Kagan, 2003*) /evidentials/.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

Some *would /hedges/* argue that there was a shift of roles (*Kagan, 2003; Burwell and Daalder, 1999*) /evidentials/. It is clear that the past European history had solid grounds in war and violence, with desire of conquering new territories and overpowering other country. *However /transitions/*, the continent, after World War II, was in ruins. The economy collapsed completely and the horror of the human atrocities performed during war times gave Europeans a new desire of finding peace and stability over force and conquests (*Hitchcock, 2003*) /evidentials/. With the essential help of the United States, introducing the Marshall Plan to restructure their economy and rebuild their cities, Europe was able to prosper beyond anyone's dreams with the creation of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (*Ibid*) /evidentials/. The OECD subsequently transforms into the European Community, in which resulted in the present European Union, seeking for peace, prosperity and stability by economical pacts and treaties. With time, WE and EU become the two most important economic blocks and biggest trade partners (*Bretherton and Vogler, 1999*) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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### Paragraph 4

The creation of NATO, against the USSR and the communist's threaten, by the US and Europe, fortified their alliance with political and military cooperation for the promotion of democracy (*The US Mission to the EU, 2010*) /evidentials/.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

*However /transitions/*, with the collapse of USSR and the unipolar structure with the end of the Cold War and US dominance, NATO became obsolete in its core purpose: against the Soviets and communists. *However /transitions/*, NATO's still gave the military umbrella that secured stability to Europe especially because of its leadership of the US. Europe dependence on the American army and NATO was reinforced by the new European Kantian's strategy – increasing the importance of law and order through cooperation (*Wood, 2008*) /evidentials/. *In contrast /transitions/*, the US enforcing a much more Hobbesian strategy – pursuing security through international submission as a sovereign - as its willingness to solve problems more rapidly was necessary any instability *may /hedges/* threaten its hegemonic character (*Kagan, 2003; Lindberg, (2005)* /evidentials/.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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### Paragraph 5

Two different strategies, though, efficient ones have provided the asymmetrical dynamic of interdependence between US and EU.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

The unipolar, Mars like, American hegemonic character does not rely in international institutions agreements neither seeks for any approval for acting. To sustain its authority, US indeed need to incline through military actions and there will be no other authority that can convince them different (*Wohlforth, 1999*) /evidentials/. *This /demonstrative reference/* was more

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*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

evident with the former republican government of Bush presidency, which gave US an even stronger unilateral character. Observing the US allegations to go to war against Iraq was under pretence of Saddam Hussein developing weapons of mass destruction. *However /transitions/*, some *may /hedges/* argue that the real reason was the interests of a neoconservative going to war for oil, under an Imperialistic advantage (*Lindberg, 2005; Cox, 2005*) */evidentials/*. The EU, acting not much as an ally, disapproved the US' decision of going to war against Iraq, sustaining the argument of not having much political position, as EU did not argue against it also. The different approach and reaction to conflicts such as Israel and Palestine *can /hedges/ also /transitions/* exemplify the divergences between EU and US interests and actions. The former does not states officially its position while the former clearly (booster) recognizes the Israel causes much more than the Palestinians (*GP tutor's surname, 2010*) */evidentials/*.

### Paragraph 6

The bilateral economical dependences between the EU and US reflects on *some /hedges/* political involvedness, *sometimes /hedges/* observed as EU keeps silent though does not agree with the US Hobbesian decisions.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

It is unlikely that the EU will ever state that is against an American decision. In times where Barack Obama's government gives emphasis to the trade with Asia, *though /transitions/* there is no symmetric relation such as US and EU, EU becomes more aware of its dependence of US trade relations (*Howorth, 2009*) */evidentials/*. The EU economical block is the most symbiotic relation that US *could /hedges/* develop in this new international dynamic, as it *could /hedges/* be considered the only possible rival in economic matter with the EURO increasing power and abroad policies coverage's (*Bretherton, and Vogler, 1999*) */evidentials/*.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

### Paragraph 7

The EU not only relies in the US huge capability from trade, but also in its exceptional role in NATO, which sustains some relation between them worth of.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

The EU, as *Henry A. Kissinger once stated /evidentials/*, is an "economic giant, but a political dwarf", *and /transitions/* that only sustains the dependence of American disposition to protect its territories, though the considerable strength of three of its member's states: the UK, France and Germany (*Howorth, 2009*) */evidentials/*. *As /transitions/* both, the US and EU still share the common sense of democracy and the pursuit of prosperity and peace, each in their own perspective of how to achieve it. Their paths at NATO remains parallel to its individual search of purpose, EU moving beyond power and US in its peak of absolute liberal authority as a sovereign.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

### Paragraph 8

*In conclusion /frame marker/*, the US, and NATO's supra military power and willingness of use of force is way too outstanding to be ignored as a major divergence in comparison to EU self contained world of law and rules. They *cannot /hedges/* be consider as enemies as both of them depended on each other economically (*Bretherton, and Vogler, 1999*) */evidentials/ and /transitions/* that both still have their relations embedded in

*Consolidation: presents the significance of the argument to the proposition*

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a transatlantic security pact through NATO (*The US Mission to the EU, 2010*) /*evidentials*/. Each follows in its own opposite philosophy which has different perspective to achieve solutions each have different amount of power. *In the same time* /*transitions*/ that they still depend on a partnership, positioning US as the superpower, with its warlike culture and EU as the economic persuasive ally that sometimes does not agree with the former *but* /*transitions*/ that still depends too much to go against it.

*Therefore* /*transitions*/, the diverging attitude towards politics and resolutions, that was exemplified in this essay *may* /*hedges*/ situate US and EU in completely different global position and political order, *but* /*transitions*/ the dependence on each other's economy *may* /*hedges*/ secure a partnership, at least now, *and* /*transitions*/ NATO's importance to Europe as military strength also emphasis its necessity towards US' as hegemonic.

*Affirmation:*  
*restates the*  
*proposition*

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### Appendix 7.3 Luana's SCS essay

*Essay topic:* How valid is the distinction made between sex (biological fact) and gender (social construct)?

SCS Essay text	Rhetorical moves
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	
<p>The comparison of equalities and exclusions between male and female became only subject of intense inquire in the last decades. The debate created around men and women's positioning in Western modern society is relevant enough to understand better the definition of sex and gender. Sex and gender have no different meaning in the English language, <i>though /transitions/</i> sociologically, both words have different significance. <i>Blum (1998) /evidentials/</i> argues that sex is the biological difference of chromosomes and hormonal profile.</p>	<p><i>Information: presents background information and contextualises the topic</i></p>
<p><i>However /transitions/</i>, gender indicates characteristics and behaviour expected by a specific community <i>and therefore /transitions/</i> is something constructed by the social environment (<i>Ridgeway, 1991) /evidentials/</i>.</p>	<p><i>Gambit: problematizes the topic</i></p>
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	
<p><i>In this essay I will argue /frame markers/</i> that there is no valid distinction between sex and gender.</p>	<p><i>Proposition: indicates the author's position</i></p>
<p>To support <i>this argument /demonstrative reference/</i>, gender will be defined as something socially constructed by a mutual relation of how men and women are viewed <i>and /transitions/</i> which are the different activities and roles that they are expected to perform (<i>Ibid) /evidentials/</i>. Consequently, the relation between segregated roles and expected behaviours influences the acceptance or exclusion of experiencing environments and tasks. <i>Finally /transitions/</i> that the attempt to distinguish both sexes by biological facts <i>may /hedges/</i> be affected <i>also /transitions/</i> by social constructions (<i>Tuana, 1989) /evidentials/</i>. Both, male and female have the same capabilities by their biological functioning, <i>however /transitions/</i>, as science has been developed by men, some (<i>Ibid) /evidentials/</i> <i>may /hedges/</i> observe, there is too much influence of the social constructions around those scientists. <i>Therefore /transitions/</i>, the "facts" of science may have been lead by a socially constructed truth and not necessarily by fact.</p>	<p><i>Marker: identifies a list of issues to be covered in the essay</i></p>
<b>Paragraph 3</b>	
<p>Men and women have different roles and activities in our society as a relation to gendered ideologies, which has been created over history (<i>ibid) /evidentials/</i>.</p>	<p><i>Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted</i></p>
<p>How men and women are recognized is a matter of impositions and expectations which <i>may /hedges/</i> be transformed over time. They have different roles and activities in our society as a relation to the perspective of the society. Gendered ideologies <i>suggests /hedges/</i> that not only men and women are viewed differently in our society but also which environment they will experience (<i>Broverman, 1972) /evidentials/</i>. <i>This /demonstrative reference/ may /hedges/</i> be easily percept in patriarchal societies which inherit traditional views of feminine and masculine roles. Religious heritage</p>	<p><i>Support: states the ground that underpin the claim</i></p>

in Christianity describes gender roles consistently as commitments that each gender should follow (*Cahill, 2004*) /evidentials/. As the *Catholic Church* /evidentials/ argues, women's role is to be at the house, taking care of the family while men are expected to provide and protect. *Moreover* /transitions/, "women should obey their husbands" (*St Paul Colossians 3:18*) /evidentials/ and *would* /hedges/ be "saved through child-bearing" (*St Paul Timothy 2:15*) /evidentials/. *These expectancies* /demonstrative reference/ are created around Christian thoughts of Eve being created from Adam's ribs, and her being the sinner that tempted Adam to eat the forbidden apple. The stereotype is established as women are labelled as tempters, weak and not wise enough to be aware of what is best for the family. *In opposition* /transitions/, men *could* /hedges/ be considered wiser, having better judgement of things.

#### Paragraph 4

*In that matter* /frame markers/, women had their capabilities denied as much as their possibilities to exercise different activities in society for decades.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

In past, women had to fight for their right of vote. The suffragettes had their capability and possibility to choose the best representation for them denied until 1928 as their seriousness was questioned (*Jaggar, 1988*) /evidentials/. In the same time, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* /evidentials/ words claimed that man was born free, during the French Revolution (*Lloyd, 1971*) /evidentials/; the suppression of women to be free to claim for their rights of their needs was a contradiction of that statement. An illustration of the present women's capability being questioned and the experience denied *would* /hedges/ be the glass ceiling. The debate about the existence of the glass ceiling for women is controversial. *Davidson and Cooper (1992)* /evidentials/ argue the existence of low payment, low status for women and gender segregated jobs. *On the other hand* /transitions/, *Furthgott-Roth and Stolba (1999)* /evidentials/ question its existence as women already achieved great deals with the sex discrimination act and equal pay legislation. The glass ceiling *may* /hedges/ raise as much contradictory accounts as the suffragettes fight had risen in the past. Either way, it is difficult to accept quietly stereotypes that results in the suppression of gender.

*Support: states the ground that underpin the claim*

#### Paragraph 5

*Furthermore* /frame markers/, the experiences that have been denied for women affected the social constructions of Western society through time.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

As is past women belonged to the private life, and the possibility to study was denied, the result of that was that any study, research and policies was held by men. Not only women and men think different (*Ibid*) /evidentials/, *but* /transitions/ them pursuit different results. The exclusion of women in science, and politics created a society that was built around men's perspective. As *Keller (Tuana, 1989: 33)* /evidentials/ argues, the social constructions were the markers of differences between the two genders. Differences supported by inequalities, exclusions and discriminations. The identity of each sex was studied by scientists from since the beginning of time. *Those men* /demonstrative reference/ were strongly influenced by patriarchal institutions, such as religion and the gender ideologies. It has

*Support: states the ground that underpin the claim*

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been argued (*Tuana, 1989*) /evidentials/ that scientific researchers have been intrinsically connected to political views.

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#### Paragraph 6

*Some may /hedges/* argue that the activities and roles that each gender performs are related to biological aspects (*Unger, 1979*) /evidentials/. In other words, a man experiences and performances in specific tasks depend on a biological disposition to develop certain skill.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

In modern society both of the genders transcended any sex barrier that traditional institutions use to deny this possibility. *However /transitions/,* no consensus has been reached even though *this /demonstrative reference/* was subject of research in ancient Greek society. Arguing that women take care of the house as they have more capability to bear and raise the children, as much as she is able to take care of the husband as a mom could, has not been proven. Especially in modern days where men are able to take care of the home as well as women. Somewhat Aristotle's argued the relation between gender capabilities intrinsic to their dispositions (*Tuana, 1989*) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the ground that underpin the claim*

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#### Paragraph 7

Scientists for years tried to reach an explanation of why does the gender roles are given differently to men and women. *But /transitions/* the pattern of depreciation as Reproduction Theories of Aristotle's explaining women's biology was proven to be mistaken.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

*Either way /transitions/,* as scientist began to study the anatomy of women, puzzles were created to justify anatomical differences and practices (*Ibid*) /evidentials/. With this in mind, scientist kept being affected by ideologies and had their observation impaired by their interpretation of what they were trying to see (*Ibid*) /evidentials/. Even though they had a male body, and female body with the same brain size and almost all the organs functioning equally, the reproductive organ gave them the possibility to sustain the pattern of depreciation of the female characteristics. As *Tuana, (1989)* /evidentials/ observes, the unconscious desire to dominate and control women sustained the pattern of fostering unfunded theories, created of course, by men (*Ibid*) /evidentials/. Men dominated for centuries the scientific industry as well the politics. *This /demonstrative reference/* enforced the possibility of the denying the emancipation of women as the former was forbidden to study. *Tuana (1989) /evidentials/* observes that and considers *this /demonstrative reference/* as a cause which impaired observance from men's point of view, minding in head those they should reinforce their power rejecting women and their possibility to find a different perspective. Facts, created by men, accepted by all, and subsequently proclaimed as reality (*Ibid*) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the ground that underpin the claim*

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#### Paragraph 8

*In conclusion /frame markers/,* in an attempt to establish the direct connection of the biological differences and the social constructions, *this essay argues /frame markers/* that it is not valid the distinction between sex and gender.

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*Affirmation: restates the proposition*

The social constructions are divided by two different aspects: the gendered ideologies and the gendered activities and roles. Gender ideologies mean the perspective of a specific society differing men and women. Gendered activities and roles mean how men and women perform different tasks in our society. **Moreover /transitions/** this essay established the mutual relation of gendered activities and gendered ideologies which **may /hedges/** result in the denial of experiencing environments caused by stereotypes. **Finally /transitions/**, the argument of male female having different roles and activities in our society because of biological differences is **something not really /hedges/** proved as each gender have the same physical and psychological capability than the other. Science has been influenced by social constructions; **therefore /transitions/**, “facts” discovered by science **may /hedges/** have stronger connection with politics and the desire of overpowering the other than biological facts.

*Consolidation:  
presents the  
significance of the  
argument to the  
proposition*

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## Appendix 7.4 Natasha's GP essay

*Essay topic:* In much of the literature, the EU is depicted as an economic giant, but a political dwarf. Do you deem this to be an accurate description of the status of the EU in international politics? Discuss your answer

GP Essay text	Rhetorical moves
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	
<p>If we look at a map of the world from the west coast of Ireland to the east of the Mediterranean, we can find the 'Eurozone' which consolidates 27 countries and represents the European Union. Almost 500 million citizens from different countries share borders and are linked with another part of world such as biggest partner in politics and economics. The supranational organization as a whole has a bigger influence on the world stage than any single countries. <i>However /transition/, sometimes there is a doubt /hedges/</i> about the EU power <i>and /transitions/</i> there is an idea that the union represents an economic giant but a political dwarf. I do not agree with this position, <i>because /transitions/</i> the EU achieved a lot in political and diplomatic world issues. <i>Also /transition/</i>, transformative economic help has a huge influence on developing countries and a decisive effect in difficult circumstances.</p>	<p><i>Information: provides the background information and contextualizes the topic</i></p>
<p><i>This essay will examine /frame markers/</i> how actions of the EU bring its political power.</p>	<p><i>Proposition: defines the focus of the essay</i></p>
<p>I <i>will begin /frame marker/</i> by explaining the principle of organization, will have a look at the international politics, will analyse the military issues in old and recent examples, <i>and /transition/</i> will consider the crisis situation in Greece.</p>	<p><i>Marker: identifies a list of issues to be covered</i></p>
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	
<p>As a founder of European unification, <i>Francois Duchene /evidentials/</i> made a link between Europe and civilian power and said that: European influence should not be wielded along traditional lines.</p>	<p><i>Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted</i></p>
<p>Military power should not be ignored, but should avoid trying to achieve military dominance. Europe should try to be a model example of relationship, could overcome war, and force the democratic standards (<i>McCormick 2007</i>) <i>/evidentials/</i>. <i>Because of this /transitions, demonstrative reference/</i>, there was a perception that Europe represents weaker power in politics than the US. <i>However /transition/</i>, the EU has broken the mould of the traditional view, even if it develops a common army and emphasizes the promotion of the military as a peacekeeper rather than a peacemaker, and reflects a new importance of economic interdependence and the strategic advantage of trading states (<i>Bretherthon; Vogler 2006</i>) <i>/evidentials/</i> trying to introduce more power in politics and economics simultaneously.</p>	<p><i>Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim</i></p>

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**Paragraph 3**

**One example /frame markers/** of the EU political power is standards.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

The EU sticks to its principles. Any European country who wants to join the EU has to respect and promote European values which are: human rights, equality, democracy, freedom and solidarity. **'Each member state wants its following members to obey the law; they are forced to obey it themselves'** (Leonard 2005. p.42) /evidentials/. The enlargement the 'big-bang' has been one of the EU successful policies, because nowadays the EU combines GDP of over 10 billion Euros, much bigger than the US (Claude; Zamor 2008) /evidentials/. **Because of /transitions/** its own rigorous principles the EU is not very accommodating towards Turkey. Even though the Parliament of Turkey has complied by adopting a package of the Constitution (1995) /evidentials/, giving political parties the right to establish women branches, effecting the abolishment of the death penalty and legalizing the broadcasting and private tutoring in Kurdish (2002) /evidentials/, all **these /demonstrative reference/** amendments were insufficient for the EU (Faucompret; Konings 2008) /evidentials/. From 2005 Turkey is in the candidate countries queue, because the member-states think Turkey has not reflected enough European values. **This /demonstrative reference/** is an example of how the EU shows its power in sticking to its standards.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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**Paragraph 4**

**The second /frame markers/** example of the EU political power we **can /hedges/** find in the EU decision-making group, who are thinking globally and have an influence on non-European nations in economic or political policies.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

The strategic decision for the EU is to have wider authority borders via economic assistance where in some cases economic help is urgent. For many developing countries the EU symbolizes important international actor (Karin; Dickson 2004) /evidentials/. The EU develops essential regional relationships with Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (79 countries). There the relation with the EU is a question of vital importance and a significant example. In the development cooperation programme are combinations of aid, trade and politics cooperation. Where, the political conditionality is main instrument for the EU and connects economic aid to political conditions (EW.08.03.10) /evidentials/. From 1975 the development cooperation policy with Lome Conventions from EEC realizes the New International Economic Order (Karin; Dickson 2004) /evidentials/. The Cotonou Agreement, the most influential trade and aid agreement ever concluded between developed and developing countries (2000) /evidentials/. Financial support from the European Development Fund to ACP is around three billion euro a year (<http://europa.eu>) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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**Paragraph 5**

In the case of Latin America (17 countries) and East Asia (14 countries), the EU promotes regional integration.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

For both positions there is commercial relation with regional, sub-regional and bilateral levels of cooperation (**EW.08.03.10**) /evidentials/. For the European Community, regionalism is the significant way to develop and consolidate cooperation for people who are living in absolute poverty. For instance, in Indonesia the wage of employees often is under one dollar. **However** /transitions/, people are happy and consider themselves lucky, because 36 million Indonesians are jobless (**Pilger 2003**) /evidentials/. **Also** /transitions/, EU-LAC effective multilateral interregional process is a relatively important economic and political relationship. The EU is the leading donor in the region, first foreign investor, and second most important trade partner after the US (**Santander; Lombaerde 2007**) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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**Paragraph 6**

**Turning now to** /frame markers/ military issues such as foreign political actor, we **can** /hedges/ find another case of political power.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

As soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, former Soviet countries have become partners rather competitors and the treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe was signed (**1990**) /evidentials/. It made the balance of power between countries and kept the military resources for building huge arsenals of weapons (**<http://www.armscontrol.org>**) /evidentials/. **According to Leonard** /evidentials/, CFE treaty is unlike Iraqi inspections, because **'EU had developed an army of inspectors to examine the rule of law and the legitimacy of elections around the world'** /evidentials/. Recently, deputy head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office **Elizabeth Wilmshurst** /evidentials/ protested military invasion and said: **"the Iraq war was illegal"** (**BBC 26.01.10**) /evidentials/. **However** /transition/, the internal disagreement about the Iraq war prompted scholars to conclude that the EU suffered its 'capabilities-expectations gap' despite the ESD Policy (**Bossuyt 2007**) /evidentials/. **Whereas** /transition/, Bush administration decided to force the EU preferred a non-military solution. **"While Americans are more willing to act alone, refusing even to allow their soldiers to wear the blue helmets of the UN, Europeans prefer multilateral approaches to security problems backed by UN resolution"** (**McCormick 2007 p. 61**) /evidentials/. **Machiavelli** /evidentials/ famously thought: it is better to be feared than to be loved, but it is also vital not to be hated (**Leonard 2005**) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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**Paragraph 7**

The difficulties to distinguish between economic and political power are visible in the actions of the EU during the crisis in Georgia where the quick and operative political decision was a guarantee for peace.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

On the 12<sup>th</sup> August 2008, just 5 days after the invasion of Russian Federation troops into Georgia over control of South Ossetia, the EU played a crucial role in stopping the fighting (**<http://europa.eu>**) /evidentials/. The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Security and Defense and the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the situation in Georgia

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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(<http://www.mfa.gov.ge>) /evidentials/. Barroso and Sarkozy signed the agreement (6 point plan) in Tbilisi and Moscow (<http://europa.eu>) /evidentials/. In accordance with the Conclusions of the Extraordinary European Council, it was decided to establish an autonomous civilian monitoring mission in Georgia. In only two weeks, the EU succeeded in deploying more than 200 monitors from 22 Member States (<http://www.mfa.gov.ge>) /evidentials/. Furthermore /transitions/, the EU provided substantial financial and practical post-conflict support to Georgia - €9 million in immediate humanitarian aid and the total pledge by international donors is €3.44 billion (<http://europa.eu>) /transitions/. Looking through all the actions, it *can* /hedges/ be seen, that the EU make immediate political decisions and regulate military issue.

### Paragraph 8

*The new* /frame marker/ challenge for the EU is the recent financial crisis in Greece.

*Claim: states why the proposition is to be accepted*

From *BBC news* /evidentials/ the new package of requests from Greece government was welcomed by the EU and the International Monetary Fund, but condemned by Greek trade unions. The more important issue is that the EU had called for austerity measures amid fears that Greece's problems *could* /hedges/ undermine the eurozone. As the President of EC Jose Manuel Barroso /evidentials/ said, the plan for cutting financial deficit *"takes all necessary measures"* /evidentials/. The *International Monetary Fund* /evidentials/ called it a *"very strong package"* /evidentials/ and Mr Papandreou is due to meet German Chancellor in Berlin (*BBC 03.03.10*) /evidentials/. Centralized power in the EU is constrained by the principle of subsidiarity. From 1970 the harmonization of bank regulation started to take place in the EU and *'the member countries retain sovereignty and the safety net is provided entirely by member states'* (Garcia; Nieto 2005) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

### Paragraph 9

*To sum up* /frame markers/, it *can* /hedges/ be seen that the EU has already achieved a political and diplomatic position through its standards and appropriate political decisions in various situations.

*Consolidation: presents the significance of the argument*

If the EU wishes to run in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and keep its own power, exporting own vision of orders and rules among members and beyond, it has to make intelligible compromises. Even if on the political orbit new players appear with huge economic power such as China, India, Russia and Brazil. The EU is a giant political force and we will soon see the result in the case of Greece.

*Close: widens the perspective of the proposition*

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## Appendix 7.5 Natasha's SCS essay

*Essay topic:* Many institutions still use a hierarchical system of organization. Is this model outmoded or is it still valid in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?

SCS Essay text	Rhetorical moves
<b>Paragraph 1</b>	
<p>The system of hierarchical organization has survived from the past until now. <b>This /demonstrative reference/</b> is a functional way to manage people effectively, keep order and facilitate the process of getting results especially in business and also in many other institutions. In contemporary society, even if the process of the global spread of democracy has tried to create equality, inequality <b>can /hedges/</b> be seen between various ethnicities, classes, or genders. <b>These /demonstrative reference/</b> kinds of divisions represent another type of hierarchy in society, which creates personal trouble and difficulties in getting good outcomes from different institutions.</p>	<p><i>Information:</i> presents background information and contextualizes the topic</p>
<p><b>In this paper I will examine /frame markers/</b> the purpose of hierarchy, will explore the historical views on the class system <b>and /transitions/</b> then will analyse social inequalities in modern society. I conclude that hierarchy is not an old-fashioned system and it is still in use. <b>Moreover /transitions/</b>, even though there are some kinds of problems in this system, overall, a hierarchical structure makes it possible to get a productive result more quickly and successfully.</p>	<p><i>Proposition:</i> defines the topic and indicates the purpose</p> <p><i>Marker:</i> identifies a list</p>
<b>Paragraph 2</b>	
<p><b>In general /frame marker/</b>, in the hierarchical model there are lots of different levels of classes where everyone has their own place.</p>	<p><i>Claim:</i> states the reasons why the proposition is to be accepted</p>
<p>Usually this system is in use in various institutions such as business, the army, politics, education, and so on. For instance, in business <b>“the hierarchical principle is the vertical division of authority and accountability” (Zhuang 1999 p.12) /evidentials/</b>, where delegation becomes a matter of necessity. It <b>can /hedges/</b> be seen that hierarchies make it possible to manage organizations effectively <b>and /transitions/</b> there is a high level of subordination. Actually, the system functions because of disparities in education, intelligence or ability to make decisions and lead. If in any institution the structure is like a hierarchy, there is more guarantee of safety and order. The army is <b>another /transitions/</b> very good example. Any officers or soldiers just have to follow the hierarchical army structure. Instead of using their own initiative or efficiency they are obliged keep to order <b>(Rose 1946) /evidentials/</b>. It is more important to have a good decision maker because if resolutions are not good, it means the whole system fails.</p>	<p><i>Support:</i> states the grounds that underpin the claim</p>

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**Paragraph 3**

*Another example /frame markers/* of hierarchy we can find in classes.

By definition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* /evidentials/, it is impossible to group people in only one category, because of “*a society ordered by social or economic status*” /evidentials/, which can be mixed. *Many scholars, theorists or philosophers* /evidentials/ aimed to find the exact answer on this matter. For instance *Karl Marx* /evidentials/ wrote: ‘*the first question to be answered is that: What constitutes class?*’ (Wright 1997 p.6) /evidentials/, but /transitions/ he did not determine the theoretical analysis of different categories of classes. *He* /evidentials/ believed that there are just two principal class positions - capitalists and proletarians (Scott 2006) /evidentials/ and the anti-capitalist was equivalent to being pro-socialist (Wright 1997) /evidentials/.

*Claim: states the reasons why the proposition is to be accepted*

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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**Paragraph 4**

Unlike Marx, *Weber (1968)* /evidentials/ identifies three well-defined aspects within society: class, status and authority, and thinks that all of them have significant power, because he recognizes a great variety of classifications in society.

*He* /evidentials/ finds just one similarity with Marxist theory which is the economic factor. *Weber* /evidentials/ also /transitions/ thought that non-economic issues such as ‘status’ were significant. Many of us often match status with class, in other words, style or size of house, dress and accessories, eating or methods of cooking (Scott 2006) /evidentials/.

*Claim: states the reasons why the proposition is to be accepted*

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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**Paragraph 5**

*However* /frame marker/, a key follower of the Marxist theory was a revolutionary and the leader of the communist party, *Vladimir Lenin* /evidentials/, who believed that the working class was the main political class actor.

*Lenin’s* /evidentials/ monolithic view was: ‘*the history of all countries, shows that the working class... is able to work out merely trade-union consciousness... for fighting against the employers, and for trying to prevail upon the government to pass laws necessary for workers*’ (Jones 1996 p.43) /evidentials/. The main revolutionary protected the proletariat against even a socialist intelligentsia hierarchy and believed all people should have the same position in society (*Lenin* 1982) /evidentials/.

*Claim: states the reasons why the proposition is to be accepted*

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

Figure A is taken from *Wright (1997)* /evidentials/ and shows 5 kinds of class structure. The rows in this table indicate societies with different social formations which are organised in different ways and show many kinds of exploitative relationships. It is visible, that going from Feudalism to Communism, there is less and less exploitation.

Type of social formations	Labour power	Means of production	Organization	Skills	History task of revolutionary transformation
Feudalism	+	+	+	+	Individual liberty
Capitalism	–	+	+	+	Socializing means of prod

Statism	–	–	+	+	Democratization of organ. control
Socialism	–	–	–	+	Substantive equality
Communism	–	–	–	–	Self-actualization

Figure A: Exploitation-generation asset inequality(*Wright 1997 p.115*) /evidentials/**Paragraph 6**

**Moving to /frame markers/** other forms of social divisions besides class, different sociological labels such as male or female, rich or poor, black or white immediately appear.

*Claim: states the reasons why the proposition is to be accepted*

Here hierarchy has another face, which **can /hedges/** be unfair and oppressive. Gender, age and ethnicity make a picture of social variety. **On the one hand /transitions/** the issue of inequalities between groups depends on the perceptions and attitude of people **and on the other hand /transitions/** it is based on the business hierarchical system. **According to Payne (2006) /evidentials/** a person's position in a society, ethnicity, his or her age and education, employment and income are crucial attributes. **Moreover /transitions/**, when employment positions are different, then for various levels there is a different relationship with the employer, based on salary and status. In an organization or society, when one level is better positioned and stronger than another one, it subsequently has more influence and power than a worse located and feeble (*Payne 2006*) /evidentials/ one. **Additionally /transitions/**, movement from one position to another is not easy and sometimes it is impossible. For instance, for centuries in Hindu India it was impossible, because of the caste system. If somebody is born in a low and poor family it is out of the question that he or she **can /hedges/** change position or public image (*CTS 21.01.10.*) /evidentials/. Even though it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the rules there are still inviolable.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

**Paragraph 7**

**Furthermore /frame markers/**, social inequalities are expressed not just in earnings but also in education level, access to health care, and mentality.

*Claim: states the reasons why the proposition is to be accepted*

Similarity or differences among of various individuals divide them into 'better' or 'worse' positions. As a result, social inequality forms social divisions. **According to Payne (2006) "to be white, middle class, male and healthy is not only different from being black, working class, female and sick, but also different from being black, middle class, male and healthy"(p.7) /evidentials/**. He **also /transitions/** puts forward the idea, which I share with him, that imbalance among classes makes hierarchy and creates social division. What's more, people still use the model of social hierarchy and belong in concrete categories where each class has typical way of speaking, dress style and lifestyle (*Scott 2006*) /evidentials/. The classification of different kinds of classes does not have the same meanings for everyone. There is a question about the social relation between or within classes; for instance, the conjuncture with the working class and managers over workers or middle classes and the new middle class. For example, in developing countries the conceptual problem of classes was the relationship between peasant workers and capitalists (*Wright 1997*) /evidentials/.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*



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**Paragraph 8**

Nowadays, in the multinational corporations there is a difference between workers and obviously racism occurs.

*Claim: states the reasons why the proposition is to be accepted*

For instance, in the case of **Rhonda Anderson** /evidentials/ from Detroit, who has the position of Environmental Justice Organizer, *she says: “I’m a Black, a single mother... primary income earner... I can’t separate my children from the other children. I work very hard to change the conditions that our children have and that we have...”*(Szakos and Szakos 2007 p.86) /evidentials/. She started her career in a Black Hospital, when Blacks could not use ‘White Hospital’. Next she could improve her occupation as a union position and remembers: *“it was very easy to look at ... and see that all the Whites were being paid more than all the Blacks, and all the men were being paid more than all the women”*(p.87) /evidentials/. **Rhonda** /evidentials/ also remembers that the labor union was trying to get Blacks in and she was lucky because of her skin color and gender to have a possibility to get particular job.

*Support: states the grounds that underpin the claim*

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**Paragraph 9**

*To sum up* /frame markers/, because of the tendency to democratize, people try to be a member of one society, *but then again* /transitions/ we still live in a fragmented world. That is why we are in different categories of groups with strong borders between working, middle and upper classes and all of us have an awareness of this identity. The fundamental social demarcation is between a dominant minority and a subordinate majority (**Mosca 1896; Pareto 1963**) /evidentials/ and in a different way we have ruler elites and dependent masses at the top and bottom of society, respectively. This is social division, where we can see a hierarchy.

*Consolidation: presents the significance of the argument*

*However* /transitions/, at the same time, hierarchy *also* /transitions/ operates in almost all institutions and social groups predominantly *and* /transitions/ has positive outcomes, such as in the case of a profitable business. It is wrong to declare that class and hierarchy no longer matter. In my opinion, the hierarchy system of organization is applicable and a reality in modern society.

*Affirmation: restates the proposition*

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